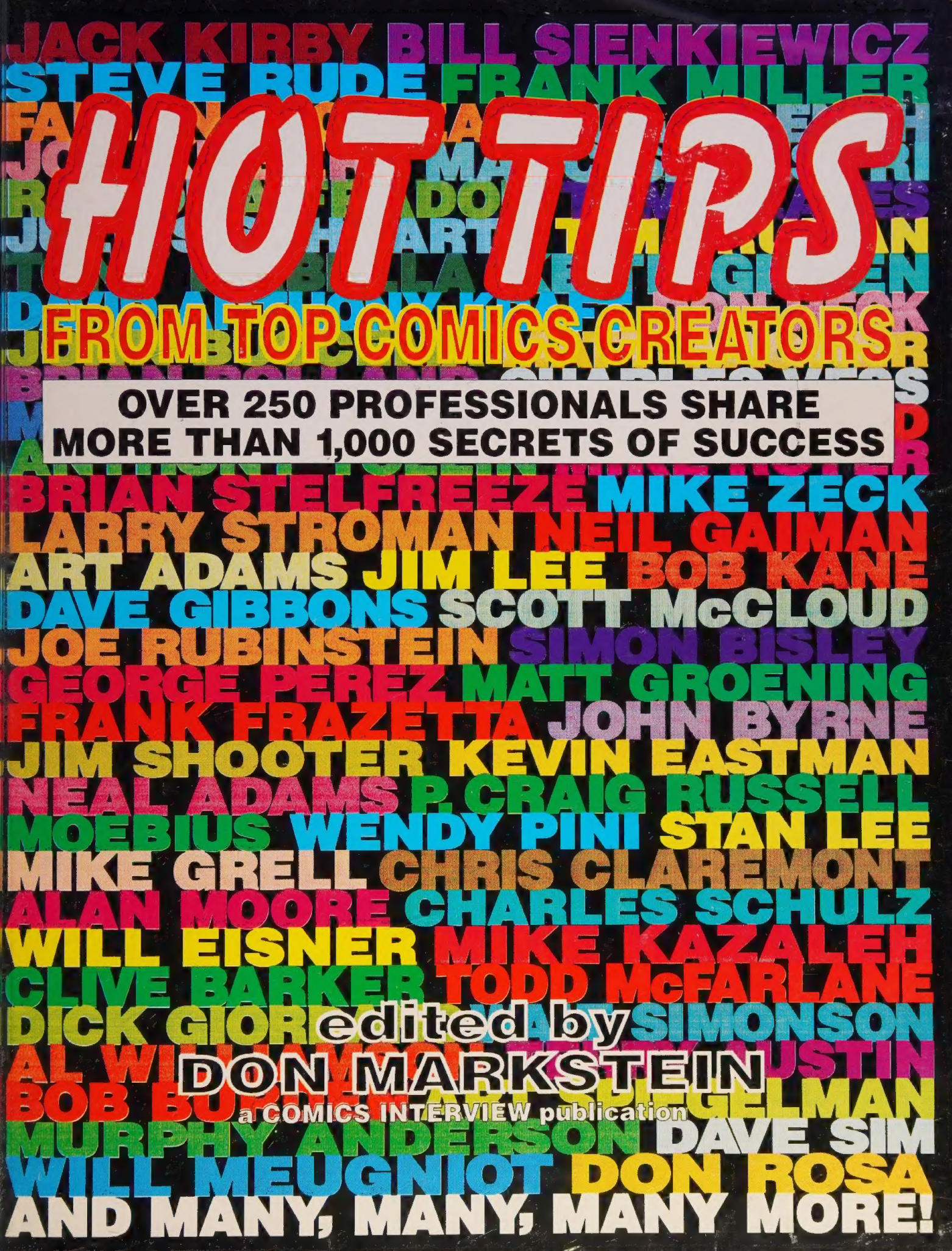
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HOT TIPS
FROM TOP COMICS CREATORS
OVER 250 PROFESSIONALS SHARE
MORE THAN 1,000 SECRETS OF SUCCESS
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MIKE ZECK
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NEIL GAIMAN
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edited by
SIMONSON
DON MARKSTEIN
a COMICS INTERVIEW publication
BOB BURDEN
ART SPIEGELMAN
MURPHY ANDERSON
DAVE SIM
WILL MEUGNIOT
DON ROSA
AND MANY, MANY, MANY MORE!

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DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT'S
COMICS INTERVIEW
presents

HOT TIPS
FROM TOP COMICS CREATORS

OVER 250 PROFESSIONALS SHARE MORE THAN 1,000 SECRETS OF SUCCESS

edited by
Don Markstein

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Introduction

by Don Markstein

David Anthony Kraft, editor and publisher of COMICS INTERVIEW, has always said that his magazine could (among other things) function as primary education for aspiring comics creators — that reading it would provide thorough knowledge of the industry, everything a talented individual would need to know to break into the field and produce top-notch comics.

The 85-90,000 words that follow are — apart from the odd editorial intrusion (indicated by the italics version of the sans-serif typeface used in this editorial) culled from the first 132 issues of COMICS INTERVIEW magazine. Over 250 comics-industry professionals provide more than *one thousand* tips that can help get you into the industry if you're not there already, or help out in your work if you are.

So — if you follow all this advice, will you automatically make it into the top echelon of comics pros? In a word — no. For one thing, you *can't* follow *all* of it because some of these words of wisdom are contradicted by others. But if you study and consider everything here, taking to heart what strikes a responsive chord and discarding only what you don't think will work in your own personal case — if you do that, then you'll be better able to make your own talents pay off with a career in comics.

Let me close with a few words from a man whose work I've admired for a long time.

Jack Jackson: I wanted my Quanah Parker book to demonstrate the wide range of possibilities of the "comics" medium. To me, the medium is tops. It can make you laugh and it can make you cry, feel guilt and pride — the whole spectrum of human emotion. You get out of it what you put into it. It can be quick and dirty, or it can be a finely wrought educational tool that gives us insight into the human predicament. The result is the measure of the artist's commitment to himself and his readers.

Tips from the Editor

I'd lose my membership in the Editorial Meddlers' Society if I didn't add a couple of tips of my own (in addition to those I took from my own material in COMICS INTERVIEW).

First, a tip to artists: The question of human anatomy in general is addressed herein by those better qualified than myself — but nobody said anything about the specific question of proportions.

The average human being is five, 5½, *maybe* six heads tall — "heads tall" being the ratio of the person's height to the size of that person's head. To make a character "cute", make him "shorter" — that is, increase the size of the head. A 4½-head character is cute, and at four-heads-even, a character is very cute indeed. Elmer Fudd is only t'wee-an'-a-half — heads tall, that is, not years old (he's actually pushing 60), and a little less than one head wide at the shoulders. And that's about as far as you can go in that direction without looking like a toothpick stuck in an orange.

To make a character look *heroic*, make him "taller". At 6½ heads, a character is starting to look heroic, and at seven he's definitely there. 7½ heads tall, maybe 2½ heads wide at the shoulders, makes a character *very* heroic-looking.

Open any superhero comic book, and

EDITOR
DON MARKSTEIN

you'll see characters eight, 8½, sometimes even nine heads tall. I have actually — I am not making this up — seen allegedly "realistic" artists draw allegedly "human" figures *ten and a half* heads tall and *five* heads wide!

Imagine! Characters more grossly disproportionate than *Elmer Fudd* are called *realistic!*

So my advice to the aspiring artist is to beat these guys at their own game. Make your characters 12, 15 — hell, make 'em *twenty* heads tall! And make their shoulders eight, no, *ten* heads wide!

After all, what could look more *heroic* than a golf ball balanced on top of a gallon jug?

Next, a tip for writers: Stuck for a name for your character? Do what the pros do — just misspell a common English word. Better yet, stick two words together and misspell both of 'em. Drop the silent letters. Change an I to a Y, an OO to a U, a C to a K — or a Q, if you want to get *really* creative. And to stay in tune with the times, be sure to invoke blood and/or death in your character's name.

After all, what could sound more *creative* than *Dethblud?*

And finally, a tip to *all* who would practice the comics-creating art. Actually, this isn't so much a tip as a heartfelt plea.

Remember the words of Mammy Yokum: "Good is better than evil because it's nicer."

I always thought that was an amusingly-phrased tautology. But I look at some of the comics coming out these days, and I wonder.

The Tipsters

Art Adams has been a fan-favorite artist for about a decade. His credits run the gamut from X-MEN to GUMBY.

Neal Adams made a big name for himself in the 1960s as one of comics' top young artists — and later an even bigger name as one of comics' top champions of creators' rights. He operates Continuity Studios, which does commercial work in graphics and publishes comics on the side.

Brent Anderson first rose to prominence as a penciller for Marvel Comics. He became one of the first to enter the independent comics segment, with SOMERSET HOLMES, which he did in collaboration with Bruce Jones.

Murphy Anderson is a long-time comics artist with credits far too extensive to touch on in a single paragraph. His fondly-remembered inking work on the DC comics of the early 1960s and his collaboration with Curt Swan to bring new life to Superman in the '70s are only two highlights of an exemplary career.

John Arcudi is a comics writer with a variety of credits over the past few years. He is best known for his work at Dark Horse.

Terry Austin is a highly accomplished inker whose work on X-MEN put such a strong artistic stamp on that title, that three years after he left, many fans thought he was still there. He is also well known for his embellishment of Marshall Rogers' BATMAN.

Dick Ayers has worked as both penciller and inker for a variety of comics publishers for decades. One of several high points to his career was when he inked Jack Kirby's seminal work at Marvel in the early 1960s.

Chris Bachalo is the artist of a variety of projects from DC's Vertigo imprint. He pencilled the DEATH mini-series and is the artist of Marvel's GENERATION X.

Kyle Baker has made a name for himself as one of comics' most innovative young writer/artists. His work on company-owned DC and Marvel comics paved the way for his own more distinctive projects, such as THE COWBOY WALLY SHOW and I REMEMBER SATURN.

Clive Barker is a multi-media sensation. After achieving prominence as a writer of horror novels, he then tackled cinema. More recently, he has turned his attention to comics.

Mike Baron first rose to prominence as the creator and writer of the popular and critically-acclaimed NEXUS, and then spread his work throughout the industry. He writes THE PUNISHER for Marvel.

Dan Barry is best known for his four-decade stint as artist and sometimes writer on the FLASH GORDON daily newspaper strip, the last few years of which were printed in COMICS REVUE. He is currently applying his considerable artistic talent to comics from Dark Horse to Marvel.

John Beatty is an inker whose work has appeared in a number of titles from Marvel Comics.

Terry Beatty has drawn MS. TREE for at least four different publishers, and later collaborated with Max Allan Collins on WILD DOG for DC.

Gail Beckett is a colorist and letterer who has used a wide variety of styles and techniques over the years. Her association with comics began when she became assistant to veteran FLASH GORDON artist Dan Barry.

Paul Becton has worked for over a decade

in the production department of Marvel Comics. He is currently Marvel's coloring coordinator.

Karen Berger has been a DC editor for several years, mostly associated with their horror titles. When DC started its Vertigo imprint, she became its executive editor.

Alfred Bester is widely known as a first-rate science fiction writer. Less widely known is the fact that he wrote many, many comic-book stories during the 1940s and '50s.

Enki Bilal has been a prominent part of the European comics scene since the 1970s. Through translations of his work with writer Pierre Christin, he has more recently developed a following in America.

Simon Bisley is a hot young Scottish artist whose work on LOBO and the Batman/Judge Dredd crossover only increased an already large international fan following.

Steve Bissette is an accomplished comics artist, and an outspoken champion of creators' rights.

Bill Black is the founder and publisher of AmeriComics, an independent oriented toward comics history and the traditional superhero, which has carved out its own niche in the market.

Brian Bolland was part of the "British Invasion" of American comics. His early work on Judge Dredd was only the beginning of a career that has led to international acclaim.

Ted Boonthanakit started in comics as artist on MICRA, where his work shone brightly enough to get him cover-painting work at TSR, Topps and Marvel. He has worked regularly on movie storyboards since the late 1980s.

Mark Borax works as a journalist in the comics field. The tips here were taken from his appearance in COMICS INTERVIEW as *interviewer,* not the guy on the usual side of the microphone.

Malcolm Bourne started out as a "letterhack," but is beginning to make a place for himself in the professional comics arena.

Nathaniel Branden is not associated with comics, except as an occasional reader. He is a renowned psychologist and author, and was a long-time associate of Ayn Rand.

Berke Breathed is the creator, writer and artist first of the syndicated strip BLOOM COUNTY and then of OUTLAND. His receipt of a Pulitzer Prize for newspaper cartoons sparked controversy among political cartoonists.

Chester Brown is the creator of YUMMY FUR, which achieved a high degree of critical acclaim in the late 1980s.

Rick Bryant is an inker with many years' work behind the scenes as an assistant to most of the big-name inkers in the business. More recently, he has achieved public recognition as an artist.

Bob Burden writes, draws, and created FLAMING CARROT, who is *not* the world's only brain-damaged superhero (there are at least two others).

John Buscema is a 40-year veteran artist. He worked for many different publishers before settling down at Marvel, where he has been since the mid-1960s.

Sal Buscema has pencilled most of Marvel's characters during his several decades in the comics industry.

John Byrne reached the heights of the industry as artist on X-MEN during the rise of that title to prominence. He reached even greater heights as the revamper of Superman. Today, he's creating and owning his own characters.

Mike Carlin is a writer and editor with a lengthy career at Marvel and DC. He has primary responsibility for editing and coordinating the various Superman series and the entire DC line.

John Celardo is a veteran artist of newspaper comic strips. Aside from his decades on TARZAN, he has runs on BUZ SAWYER and TALES OF THE GREEN BERET to his credit. He also served a stint as editor for King Features Syndicate.

Bill Chadwick was the first "fan on the street" interviewed in COMICS INTERVIEW. He went on become its first managing editor. He spends his days writing western novels.

Paul Chadwick created the popular and critically-acclaimed CONCRETE, published by Dark Horse. He works mostly in the film industry, drawing storyboards.

Howard Chaykin has been active for the past quarter-century or so as a comics writer and artist. Among his works are IRONWULF, AMERICAN FLAGG and DOMINIC FORTUNE. He created, wrote and drew POWER AND GLORY.

Sharon Cho became the second person in America to make a living as a full-time agent for comics creators, when she signed on with Mike Friedrich's Star*Reach Productions.

Chris Claremont achieved prominence through his association with X-MEN — or perhaps it would be more accurate to say X-MEN achieved prominence through its association with Chris,

whose 17 years of scripts turned a collection of second-string superheroes into the flagship of Marvel's most popular line.

Gene Colan has decades of comics art to his credit, in genres from superheroes to romance. He is regarded by fellow artists as a supreme pencil stylist.

Max Allan Collins is a mystery novelist as well as a writer of comics. Although he has a lengthy stint scripting the DICK TRACY newspaper strip to his credit, he is probably best known as co-creator (with Terry Beatty) of MS. TREE.

Ernie Colón worked for many years in relative obscurity at Harvey Comics. His work since leaving Harvey, which includes AMETHYST and THE MEDUSA CHAIN, has had a higher profile.

Joe Colquhoun (pronounced "Co-hoon") is relatively unknown in the U.S.A., but in Britain he is well known indeed. His art in British weeklies spans four decades, and includes the critically-acclaimed CHARLEY'S WAR.

Gerry Conway has written hundreds upon hundreds of comics stories, but will never escape being remembered as the man who killed Gwen Stacy in SPIDER-MAN. He now puts much of his creative effort into film writing.

Peter David is not only a highly-regarded writer of comics, but also — through his weekly column in COMICS BUYER'S GUIDE — a prominent commentator on the industry.

Jon Davidge is a relative newcomer to comics — but has quickly gotten into the swing of things at Britain's Fleetway. Among other things, he directs the course of their weekly comics line, including the highly-regarded 2000 AD.

Jack Davis is one of our industry's distinguished alumni. In the 1950s, he was illustrating EC comics. As recently as the '60s, he drew RAWHIDE KID for Marvel. Nowadays, you're more likely to find his work on the cover of TIME.

Jerry De Fuccio had a long and distinguished career at MAD magazine, going back to the time of EC Comics. After leaving MAD, he went to work for its number-one competitor, CRACKED. He now freelances.

Ann DeLarrye-Gold is one of the founders of the Chicago ComiCon, one of America's largest gatherings of the comic-book community.

J.M. DeMatteis is a comics scripter who specializes in superheroes, and in more complex material in which he has personal stake. He is at work on several creator-owned projects.

David DeVries is a member of Australia's comics industry. THE SOUTHERN SQUADRON, which he created in 1982 and continues to write, started out as a parody of American superhero groups. He also contributes to American comics.

Chuck Dixon is a writer of comics with a variety of experience behind him. He has worked in virtually every genre and for virtually every comics company.

John Dixon is the writer/artist of Australia's well-known and long-running AIR HAWK newspaper strip.

Bojan Djukic is a comics artist and journalist whose "beat" is Europe. He has also worked in animation for Spielberg's Amblin Entertainment.

Shel Dorf has worked in comics as a journalist, letterer, and many other capacities, for decades. He founded the San Diego Comic-Con. He has seen the industry from many different angles and so has many observations to share.

Arnold Drake is a veteran comics writer, with hundreds of scripts to his credit over a period of decades. Among many other things, he created DC's Deadman.

Stan Drake has been a writer and artist of newspaper comic strips for years and years. His work on THE HEART OF JULIET JONES has long been admired by a coterie of enthusiasts. His later work reaches a much wider audience — he draws BLONDIE.

Gaylord Dubois stands in the top echelon of comics writers not only for quality, but also for sheer volume. TARZAN, THE LONE RANGER, ROY ROGERS . . . scarcely a series from Dell and Gold Key during the 1940s through the '70s escaped his deft touch.

Jo Duffy is a writer and editor of comics with experience at both Marvel and DC. Her work on CATWOMAN sparked controversy on sexism in comics — to the point where one writer outside our field actually mistook her gender!

Jerry Dumas has worked in newspaper comics for decades, mostly behind the scenes on Mort Walker's strips. He is very well known among daily-strip enthusiasts as the creator of SAM'S STRIP.

Kevin Eastman became a major player in the comics industry when TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES, which he co-created with Peter Laird, gave him the wherewithal not only to publish comics of artistic merit, but also to found a museum devoted to the field.

Will Eisner is a living legend in the comics industry. His 1940s newspaper feature, THE SPIRIT, garnered a fan following that has endured and grown ever since. His book, COMICS AND SEQUENTIAL ART, is one of a handful that belong on the shelf of every comics professional.

Mark Ellis put in a stint as editor-in-chief and senior writer at Millennium Comics. He was instrumental in their revival of Doc Savage.

Steve Englehart scripted the majority of top characters at DC and Marvel during the 1970s. Perhaps his most memorable work during that time was an eight-issue stint on DETECTIVE COMICS. Returning to comics after several years writing in other fields, he now freelances for several publishers.

Mark Evanier has written dozens of series — not only in comics, but also on TV. He co-created (with Will Meugniot) DNAGENTS and does "something or other" on GROO THE WANDERER.

Vince Fago is well known to fans of old-time funny animals. During the 1940s he drew such Marvel superstars as Silly Seal and Krazy Krow. He put in a stint as editor-in-chief at Marvel years before the creation of FANTASTIC FOUR.

Ramona Fradon spent a couple of decades at DC Comics, drawing such characters as Aquaman, Metamorpho and the Super Friends. She left DC to take over the art on the BRENDA STARR syndicated strip.

Frank Frazetta won a Hugo Award for his cover paintings on the 1960s Ace editions of the works of Edgar Rice Burroughs. He went on to create the definitive look of Conan the Barbarian. He has been in and out of the comics industry over the years, starting with a late-1940s stint as Al Capp's assistant on LI'L ABNER.

Mark Freedman was working in the licensing field when he first heard of TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES. He got in touch with Eastman and Laird, and the rest is history.

Jan Michael Friedman entered the comics field as a STAR TREK scripter, but has since garnered non-TREK credits.

Mike Friedrich started in comics as a writer, but soon became an editor/publisher. Responding to a need that only he was able to see, in the early 1980s he became the comics industry's first full-time agent. Today, his Star*Reach agency represents some of the biggest names in the field.

Neil Gaiman first attracted notice as Alan Moore's scripting successor on MIRACLEMAN, but quickly struck out on his own with the popular and critically-acclaimed SANDMAN.

José Luís Garcia-Lopez is highly regarded by most comics professionals for his dynamic layouts — even at points in the story where relatively little drama is taking place. His career drawing American comics spans the last couple of decades.

Steve Gerber created Howard the Duck — which, aside from the obvious merits of the act itself, brought great attention to the creators' rights issue. He now puts most of his creative effort into the animation industry.

Dave Gibbons has been called "The Ringo Starr of comics" — his work isn't flashy and attention-getting, but many of the industry's greatest talents want to work with him. He first came to the attention of American readers with his art on Alan Moore's WATCHMEN. Recently, he's been working with Frank Miller on MARTHA WASHINGTON.

Keith Giffen is the writer/artist behind such offbeat creations as Ambush Bug and Lobo. His distinctive touch has been seen in many Marvel, DC and Topps Comics series, from DEFENDERS to MARS ATTACKS.

Michael Gilbert is an accomplished writer and artist with credits in superheroes, funny animals and many other genres. He is best known for MR. MONSTER.

Peter B. Gillis is a comics writer who first achieved prominence with at First Comics.

Dick Giordano is a veteran of the comics field. Before he became a DC Comics executive, he'd already had a career as both editor and artist, and was best known for his outstanding ability as an inker.

Gerry Giovinco is one of the founders of Comico, the comic company responsible for bringing Matt Wagner into the field.

Mike Gold has worked as an editor, publicist, convention organizer and journalist. He currently hangs his hat at Classics International Entertainment, where he is hard at work developing a revival of CLASSICS ILLUSTRATED.

Kurt Goldzung ran the sales department at First Comics.

Archie Goodwin is a distinguished writer and editor of comics, with credits far too numerous to list. He currently works for DC Comics.

Alan Grant was one of the early writers on Britain's Judge Dredd. His work crossed the Atlantic as part of that island's early-1980s invasion of the American comics industry, and since

then he has done a great deal of scripting for DC, including Lobo and Batman.

Steven Grant is a writer whose work has appeared in many comics from Marvel, Dark Horse and others.

Mike Grell is a long-time artist with a loyal fan following. He created STARSLAYER, JON SABLE — FREELANCE, and several other well-known comics series.

Matt Groening started writing and drawing comics with LIFE IN HELL, branched out into animation with THE SIMPSONS, and has more recently made a splash in the comics field with the Bongo Comics line.

Mark Gruenwald has for years put his editorial stamp on Marvel Comics. His vast knowledge of Marvel's continuity is credited by many as essential in keeping stories on track and not violating "facts" already established.

Jackson Guice entered the comics field as artist on the black-and-white SOUTHERN KNIGHTS, but quickly moved on to the big-money stuff — Marvel's mutants and DC's SUPERMAN.

Paul Guinan works on the production side of comics. Among other things, he was responsible for re-working LONE WOLF AND CUB for publication in the format of American comics.

Bob Hall is an editor, writer and artist who divides his time between various projects for comics, most recently at Valiant, and directing stage plays.

Larry Hama is an editor and writer. In reviving GI JOE, he masterminded a long-running toy-based series that achieved great popularity — although critics virtually ignored it. He also scripts WOLVERINE.

Ed Hannigan is a writer and artist with extensive credits at both Marvel and DC. One highlight of many is his art on the first five issues of LEGENDS OF THE DARK KNIGHT — DC's highest-selling comic of 1989.

Don Heck is a long-time comics artist whose pleasing and distinctive style has attracted generations of admirers. He has pencilled for many different publishers, including a lengthy stint at Marvel during its early-1960s heyday.

Fred Hembeck is a writer and artist whose strong orientation toward the sillier aspects of our industry makes him the exception in mainstream comics. He pencilled one issue of SPECTACULAR SPIDER-MAN, in addition to his regular work on such esoterica as FRED HEMBECK DESTROYS THE MARVEL UNIVERSE.

Mike Higgins started out in the Marvel production department in the mid-1970s, as a letterer. Later, he switched departments and became a writer and editor.

Rick Hoberg began his art career in comics as an assistant to Russ Manning — an origin he shares with such luminaries as Mike Royer, Bill Stout and Dave Stevens. He went on to work for Marvel, and was part of the team that first brought the X-Men to television animation.

Tony Isabella is best known today as a comics writer, but he's worn a variety of hats in the industry — including, for several years, having owned a comics store.

Jack Jackson was one of the pioneers of underground comics, where he signed his work "Jaxon". His more recent output on the history of the Southwest U.S. in comics form has drawn unanimous praise from critics.

Lance Jacobs is the "Head Honcho" of Raging Rhino Productions, a small independent comics publisher.

Ferd Johnson probably holds the record for the longest creator stint in American comics — two-thirds of a century writing and drawing the syndicated MOON MULLINS strip.

Kelley Jones has cut a wide swath in the comics industry as artist on a diverse selection.

Dan Jurgens has been part of the comics industry since the early 1980s. His credits include WARLORD, BATMAN, TEEN TITANS and many others — including, most recently, SUPERMAN.

Bob Kane is credited as the creator of Batman.

Mike Kazaleh is mostly associated with the funny-animal genre. His early comics writing and art appeared mainly in the independently-published CAPTAIN JACK, but now that the genre is making a comeback, his current series is the Marvel Comics version of REN & STIMPY.

Branislav "Bane" Kerac (pronounced "Bruh-nee-slav (Bu-nae) Khe-ruts") is one of the premier cartoonists of Eastern Europe. The international situation being what it is these days, it's only a matter of time before his work is well known in America.

Sam Kieth achieved widespread attention as co-creator of Neil Gaiman's SANDMAN. He went on to draw WOLVERINE for Marvel and then his own title, THE MAXX, for Image.

Jack Kirby — They say a man's greatness can be gauged by the brevity of his statue's inscription. When the comics industry erects a

statue to this man, all we'll need to put on it is "King."

Todd Klein is a highly-accomplished letterer, whose work at DC includes logos for many books.

Kazuo Koike is the writer of the Japanese work that Frank Miller considers the best comic book in the world. It was published in America as LONE WOLF AND CUB.

Goseki Kojima drew the Japanese work that we know as LONE WOLF AND CUB.

Alex Kotzky entered the comics industry in 1940 and soon went to work in Will Eisner's studio. Later on, he started the newspaper strip APARTMENT 3-G, which he wrote and drew for many years.

David Anthony Kraft is the publisher of COMICS INTERVIEW — and of quite a few books, including this one. With decades of experience as a comics writer, editor and publisher, he is able to offer insights from both sides of the desk, creative and business.

John Kricfalusi is one of the hottest names in animation these days. THE REN & STIMPY SHOW is his best known creation, but far from the only one.

Joe Kubert is well-known as a long-time, extremely talented artist, somewhat less known as a writer and editor, but probably *best* known as the founder of America's first school aimed exclusively at teaching students how to write and draw comics.

Peter Laird co-created (with Kevin Eastman) the TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES.

Nick Landau was one of the architects of the "British Invasion" of American comics. He's not a writer or artist — he edits and publishes comics. It was through his Titan Books that Americans first became aware of Judge Dredd.

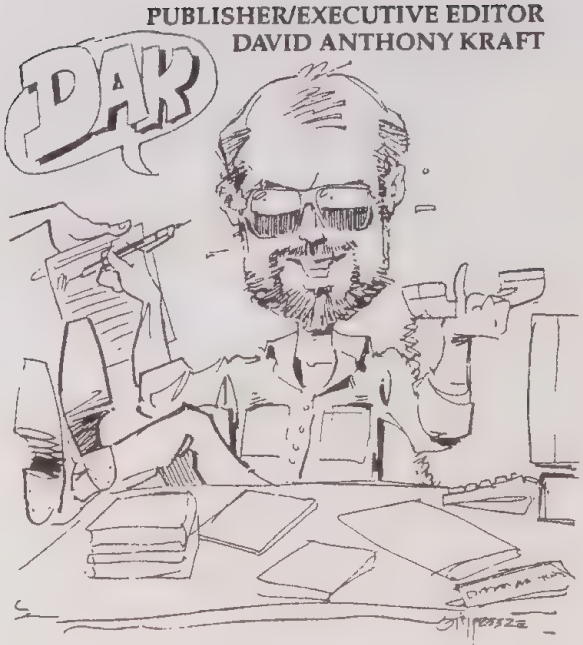
Bob Larkin is a cover painter who has worked mostly for magazines and paperbacks. However, he's also done quite a few covers for Marvel.

Erik Larsen is an artist who does his own writing. He is one of the founders of Image Comics.

Batton Lash is a self-made man in comics. He not only created WOLFF & BYRD and continues to write and draw it — he also syndicated it himself and continues to promote it.

Jim Lawrence is a long-time writer of paperbacks and newspaper comics. He is best known in our field for his adaptations of James Bond novels into syndicated comics form.

PUBLISHER/EXECUTIVE EDITOR
DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT



Jim Lee first made a name for himself as one of Marvel Comics' hot young up-and-comers — then he left to become one of the founders of Image Comics.

Stan Lee was editor and chief scripter of Marvel Comics from the 1940s to the '70s. His prominence in the comics field is such that any time a "Stan" is mentioned without a last name — that's him. His only current comics writing is in the SPIDER-MAN newspaper strip, which is available in COMICS REVUE magazine.

Vince Lee is a video game designer whose credits include MONKEY ISLAND and INDIANA JONES.

Steve Leialoha has been pencilling and inking for Marvel and many other companies since the 1970s.

Paul Levitz is a top DC Comics executive — but more than that, he's an established comics professional, with scads of scripts to his credit, on many different series.

Rob Liefeld was a fan favorite artist at Marvel before he left to become one of the founders of Image Comics.

William Messner-Loebs has had a mixed career in comics. He is equally well-known for his scripting on DC-owned properties such as FLASH and WONDER WOMAN, and his own creations such as JOURNEY and EPICURUS THE SAGE. He is an accomplished artist, as well.

Ken Lopez is a production letterer, able to mimic the styles of all the freelancers whose work he is called upon to make changes in.

Mark Lucas started as a "letterhack", but is beginning to make a place for himself in the professional comics arena.

Glenn Lumsden may not be well known in America, but his art credits in Australia include SOUTHERN SQUADRON and BODYGUARD. Recently, his work has begun to appear in the U.S.

Tom Lyle was catapulted to sudden fame as artist on the 1990 ROBIN mini-series. He went on to draw SPIDER-MAN at Marvel.

Jeff MacNelly is a well-known and frequently disagreed-with editorial cartoonist, and writer/artist of the popular newspaper strip SHOE.

Dennis Mallonee is the publisher, editor and chief writer of Heroic Comics, an independent producing traditional superhero comics that don't quite fit the current Marvel/DC mold.

Don Markstein is the editor of this book. His comics scripts span genres from funny animals to horror. He edited A PRINCE VALIANT COMPANION (1992) and is editor of the monthly COMICS REVUE.

Julia Mather is international marketing director of COMICS INTERVIEW. She also came up with the idea for this book.

Joe Matt writes and draws autobiographic comics for independent publishers here and there. He also works in the industry as a colorist.

Val Mayerik entered the comics industry as an artist in the mid-1970s. He has worked on a variety of series for a number of publishers, and is widely known as the first artist to draw Howard the Duck.

David Mazzucchelli gained prominence in the early 1980s for his art on DAREDEVIL and BATMAN. His interests now lie exclusively in creator-owned, independently-published comics, such as those appearing in his self-published RUBBER BLANKET.

Scott McCloud sprang upon comics like Athene from the head of Zeus. His first bylined work, ZOT!, displayed writing and illustrating ability already fully formed — or so we thought, until we saw his later works. His book, UNDERSTANDING COMICS, is one of a handful that belong on the shelf of every comics professional.

Todd McFarlane set a sales record for American comics writing and drawing the 1990 SPIDER-MAN #1 — and then chucked it for even greater success at Image, where his SPAWN achieved the industry's top sales spot. All this, *plus* a minor career as a successful comics retailer.

Angus McKie is a British comics artist whose work first came to the attention of Americans by being reprinted in HEAVY METAL.

Will Meugniot is best known in comics for his art on VANITY and DNAGENTS. The bulk of his work has been in animation, and he was partly responsible for development of X-MEN for TV.

Frank Miller is the writer and artist of many comics series with both critical acclaim and commercial appeal, such as DAREDEVIL and DARK KNIGHT. His later work includes SIN CITY and HARD-BOILED.

Pat Mills is a British comics writer whose credits include DOCTOR WHO, DAN DARE and METALZOIC. His claim to fame is the creation of the weekly anthology comic 2000 AD. He now writes U.S. comics as well.

Bernie Mireault is an artist with a highly individual style. Over the past ten years, his work has appeared in such diverse series as MACKENZIE QUEEN, THE JAM and GRENDEL.

Ken Mitchroney has worked in animation and done funny-animal comics on the side for years and years. More recently, the comics side of his career has been expanded through his association with TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES.

Moebius (aka Jean Giraud) achieved great prominence in the French comics industry before his work was imported, in the 1970s, in HEAVY METAL magazine. Since then, his work has received near-unanimous critical acclaim. He currently makes his home in New York.

Doug Moench is a prolific scripter of mainstream comics, and an occasional writer of creator-owned projects as well.

Sheldon Moldoff is a name which looms large in the history of comics. He was the first artist on the 1940s version of Hawkman, and worked for many years as a ghost for Bob Kane.

Jim Mooney is an artist whose solid storytelling skills have brought him the admiration of generations of fans. His credits over several decades in the industry are too numerous to list.

Alan Moore one of the few comics *writers* to achieve superstar status. He attracted attention for his work on MIRACLEMAN, SWAMP THING and WATCHMEN. His more recent work includes FROM HELL and A SMALL KILLING.

Rich Morrissey is a writer, journalist and historian of the comics industry.

Dean Motter is a writer, artist, designer and art director who was largely responsible for the distinctive look of MISTER X. He is better known

for his later work on DC's adaptation of THE PRISONER.

Jan Mullaney was co-founder (with his brother, Dean) of Eclipse Comics — a very early independent publisher, which put such works as ZOT!, MIRACLEMAN and BROUGHT TO LIGHT into print.

John Cullen Murphy for many years was writer/artist of the BIG BEN BOLT newspaper strip. In 1972 he moved up, when Hal Foster chose him to take over PRINCE VALIANT.

Andy Mushynsky is an inker whose work has appeared in many series from Marvel, Dark Horse and others.

Fabian Nicieza put in several years as an editor at Marvel before leaving for a full-time freelance life, scripting X-MEN and others.

Floyd Norman has done a great deal of art in comics and animation over a great many years. His personal favorite among his comics credits is KATY KEENE. He currently produces comics for the Walt Disney Company, for newspaper strips and the overseas market.

Rick Norwood has achieved acclaim as publisher of a breathtakingly beautiful series of deluxe PRINCE VALIANT reprints. He also published A PRINCE VALIANT COMPANION (1992) and is current publisher (and former editor) of COMICS REVUE magazine.

Jim Novak is a letterer whose work has appeared mostly in Marvel publications. He also executed the original COMICS INTERVIEW logo.

Charles S. Novinskie is an associate editor of COMICS INTERVIEW and an assistant editor at Topps Comics.

Bill Oakley has done a considerable amount of work as a "corrections" letterer, a specialty requiring great expertise in precisely matching the style and stroke weight of the surrounding work.

Steve Oliff is an innovative colorist who has set standards with Olyoptics for enhancing comics art with color.

Ed O'Neal claims his great-great uncle was 87 years old when Ed last personally witnessed the practice he describes in his tip on health maintenance, and lived a considerable number of years longer, so there must be some validity to the tip.

Denny O'Neil has both written and edited most of the "big guns" of Marvel and DC. His stable includes the BATMAN titles.

Tom Orzechowski is one of the most highly-accomplished letterers in the comics industry.

John Ostrander had already built a successful career as an actor and playwright before being recruited as a writer for First Comics. Today, he spends his days writing for DC.

Marty Pasko wrote a wide variety of series — mostly for DC, but with a notable stint on E-MAN for First Comics — before leaving the comics industry for the greener pastures of Hollywood.

Bruce Patterson is an inker with numerous credits at DC and Marvel.

Willie Peppers is a comics artist whose work has appeared mostly in such independent titles as SOUTHERN KNIGHTS.

George Pérez is a veteran comics artist with credits ranging from AVENGERS to TITANS, who branched out into writing when he took over WONDER WOMAN. He also has the perhaps-unique distinction of being famous for a project that never came out — the ill-fated Avengers/Justice League crossover.

Chuck Pfarrer is a screen writer who entered the comics field through Dark Horse's adaptation of THE THING.

Tad Pietrzykowski is one of Australia's up-and-coming writers. He is the creator and scripter of DARK NEBULA.

Bob Pinaha is a letterer, much of whose work has appeared in independent comics.

Richard Pini runs the business end of ELF-QUEST, guiding it from the germ of an idea to the international success it is today. His creative input has also contributed to ELFQUEST's success.

Wendy Pini is the creative force behind ELFQUEST — one of the first and greatest successes of self-published comics. Although her own writing and art is less frequently seen these days, her influence can still be felt in all the current ELF-QUEST titles.

Whilce Portacio first achieved notice for his art at Marvel, then quit to become one of the founders of Image.

Carl Potts is not only an artist, but also editor-in-chief of Marvel's Epic imprint.

Paul Power provided the art attributed to the Bob Newhart character on BOB. In addition to comics, he does storyboards and other work on various television series, including LOIS & CLARK.

John Prentice has been illustrating comics since the 1940s. In the '50s, he started the work for which he is best known, when he took over the RIP KIRBY newspaper strip from the late Alex Raymond.

Ron Randall is a writer and artist whose

work has been published by many different companies since the late 1970s. He created TREKKER for Dark Horse.

Rod Reed wrote and edited comics, including the original CAPTAIN MARVEL, for Fawcett Publications in the 1940s.

Mike Richardson is the owner and publisher of Dark Horse Comics. He has built a strong line of top properties, raising his company from an obscure 1980s start-up to a genuine industry phenomenon.

Steve Ringgenberg is a comics writer, editor and journalist whose scripts have been published by Marvel, DC, Archie, Americomics and others.

Jerry Robinson is a comics artist whose association with BATMAN goes back to the very beginning. His pencils and inks have been seen throughout the industry over a span of decades.

John Romita Jr. is one of comics' hottest young artists. He has worked on a wide variety of Marvel series, including X-MEN.

John Romita Sr. has placed his artistic stamp on practically every series Marvel has published over the past 30 years. It was he who first set the appearance of Mary Jane Watson-Parker.

Don Rosa has achieved the seeming-impossible by writing and drawing Uncle Scrooge stories that are almost unanimously liked by fans of Scrooge creator Carl Barks. His work can frequently be seen in Gladstone comics.

Dave Ross is the artist who illustrated Dave Darrigo's WORDSMITH for Renegade Press, among others.

George Roussos has illustrated hundreds of comics for many publishers over a period of decades. When he gave the tips quoted here, he was working as Marvel's coloring coordinator.

Jeff Rovin was a writer and editor for Warren, Atlas Comics and others in the 1970s. Nowadays, he mostly writes *about* comics and other aspects of popular culture.

Adrienne Roy is a long-time colorist, working mostly at DC Comics.

Mike Royer started out as an artistic assistant to the late Russ Manning. He was Jack Kirby's inker of choice on the Fourth World series. For the past twenty-odd years, he has produced art for the Walt Disney Company for a variety of purposes.

Joe Rubinstein joined the comics industry at age 13, as an all-'round office assistant at Continuity Studios. He is now one of the big-name superhero inkers.

Steve Rude brought a measure of style and grace to comics art with his work on NEXUS. Since then, he has lent his touch to MR. MIRACLE, WORLD'S FINEST COMICS and many others.

P. Craig Russell is best known for his exquisite adaptations of operatic works — but he's done a lot of other exquisite artwork since he broke into the industry in the 1970s.

Arn Saba has worked more in animation than comics. He is best known in our medium for NEIL THE HORSE, published by Renegade Press.

Stan Sakai is the creator, writer and artist of USAGI YOJIMBO, the manga-inspired funny animal series that has been growing increasingly prominent over the past decade or so. He also letters GROO THE WANDERER.

Tim Sale has been a comics artist since the early 1980s. His credits include GRENDEL, THIEVES' WORLD, the controversial recent revival of CHALLENGERS OF THE UNKNOWN, and Jim Lee's DEATHBLOW.

Jim Salicrup spent several years honing his editing craft at Marvel Comics. These days, he directs the editorial affairs of Topps Comics.

Charles M. Schulz is the creator, writer and artist of perhaps the world's most popular and heavily-licensed comic strip, PEANUTS.

Diana Schutz has worked in the retail and editing sectors of the comics industry. At present, she is editor-in-chief at Dark Horse.

Alvin Schwartz is one of the unsung writers of 1940s comics. He worked on all the "big guns", including Superman, Batman and Hayfoot Henry.

Julius Schwartz is generally credited as having created comics' "Silver Age" with his late-1950s revivals of DC characters of the early '40s. The comics he edited were noted for their ingenious stories and slick, attractive art.

David Scroggy has worn a variety of hats in the comics industry, from editor to trade show organizer. He is now vice president of publishing at Dark Horse Comics.

Ken Selig is an editor with more experience than any three superhero editors put together — despite the fact that many people in the industry have never heard of him. His bailiwick is Harvey Comics, a position which eminently qualifies him to offer advice on comics.

Val Semeiks is an artist known for high drama and low humor. His credits include CONAN THE BARBARIAN, THE DEMON and LOBO.

Bob Sharen is a colorist whose work has appeared in many Marvel comics.

Jim Shooter is the "Comeback Kid" of comics. He left the field after achieving fame as the teenage scripter of "Legion of Superheroes", came back and became editor-in-chief of Marvel. He lost that position, came back and started Valiant. He lost that position, came back and is now running Defiant Comics.

Bill Sienkiewicz started out as one of a myriad of Neal Adams "clones" — but quickly began to develop a unique style of his own. Today, he is one of the most highly innovative artists in the field.

Marc Silvestri became a fan favorite artist when he took over X-MEN. He is one of the founders of Image Comics.

Dave Sim created and continues to write, draw and self-publish the longest continuously-running creator-owned comic-book series in America, CEREBUS THE AARDVARK. His critical acclaim and independent spirit are equally legendary.

Louise Simonson is a writer and editor whose work has shaped Warren, Marvel and DC comics for years. Her credits include X-MEN, POWER PACK and SUPERMAN.

Walt Simonson is a writer and artist with credits all over the comics industry. At present, he isn't working for any one company, but on creator-owned projects that offer more latitude in choosing publishers.

Roger Slifer is a comics writer and editor whose work has appeared in several Marvel and DC series. He co-created Lobo, and is a producer of animation from GI JOE to CONAN.

Dan Slott is an up-and-coming young writer. He is currently scripting Marvel's version of REN & STIMPY.

Tod Smith is a comics artist who rose to prominence in the early 1980s when he pencilled THE OMEGA MEN for DC.

Art Spiegelman is the only person to date who has won a Pulitzer Prize for writing and drawing a comic book, MAUS. As Stan Lee would have put it, 'nuff said!

Jim Starlin garnered a strong fan following in the 1970s, with his personal takes on Marvel's CAPTAIN MARVEL and WARLOCK, and in the '80s with his own DREADSTAR. He also achieved notoriety for killing Robin as a result of a telephone poll.

Ken Steacy is an artist known for his bold designs. His work has appeared throughout the industry.

Brian Stelfreeze is building a reputation as one of comics' hottest cover artists. His recent work on DC'S SHADOW OF THE BAT has received favorable attention. He has also done some comics art, including CYCOPS and X-MEN.

Roger Stern is a veteran comics writer who is associated very strongly with Superman. His tips concern characterization for the Man of Steel.

Chic Stone is best known for having inked Jack Kirby in the 1960s — but his distinctive pencilling style had been known throughout the industry long before that gig.

Karl Story is a comics artist who started out in such independent publications as CYCOPS and X-THIEVES. He achieved prominence inking ALIENS VS. PREDATOR for Dark Horse Comics.

Bill Stout has been a professional comics artist since 1968. His work has appeared in everything from CYCLE-TOONS to PLAYBOY (where he assisted Harvey Kurtzman and Will Elder on "Little Annie Fanny"). He has drawn an unusually large number of dinosaurs.

Randy Stradley is vice-president and executive editor of Dark Horse Comics. He supervised the development of the company from a minor line of unknowns to a major player, capable of attracting top talent.

Jan Strnad has written a vast number of highly-acclaimed stories over the past twenty years for Warren, Fantagraphics, DC, and even (once or twice) Marvel.

Larry Stroman drew acclaim for his art on various series for Marvel, DC and Image. He gained prominence with his work on Marvel's X-FACTOR.

Tom Sutton has done his highly stylized art for practically every publisher in the business during the past quarter-century.

Arthur Suydam is not the most prolific artist in comics, but his work is very highly regarded. His credits include HEAVY METAL, EPIC and ECHO OF FUTUREPAST.

Marc Swayze wrote and drew the original CAPTAIN MARVEL and many other series for Fawcett Publications during the 1940s. In the '50s he freelanced, mostly for Charlton. Since then, he's lent his talents to non-comics artistic endeavors.

Mike Teitelbaum worked as a comics editor and writer during the early 1980s for Gold Key Comics.

Greg Theakston is best known in the industry for the "Theakstonizing" process, wherein

old comics are bleached to yield black-and-white proofs for reprinting. His tips here concern his work as a colorist.

Roy Thomas was one of the first comic-book fans to "turn pro". As writer and editor, he has worked for comics publishers from coast to coast, including a stint as editor-in-chief at Marvel. He divides his time between the comics and movie industries.

Dan Thorsland began his editorial career at DC, and now works at Dark Horse. He coordinates their various STAR WARS titles, and scripted the DROIDS limited series.

Anthony Tollin has worked for many years as a colorist for DC Comics. He also had a stint in the mid-1980s as editor of COMICS REVUE.

Timothy Truman is one of the most prominent graduates of Joe Kubert's School of Comic Art. After cutting his teeth with writing and art at DC, First and Eclipse, he now runs his own 4Winds Studios.

Ron Turner was a wildcat publisher of comics before there was such thing as an "independent" publisher. As founder and owner of Last Gasp, he still keeps his hand in.

Jim Valentino entered comics in the 1980s as writer/artist of the superhero spoof, NORMALMAN. After a stint at Marvel, he left to become one of the founding artists of Image Comics.

Kevin VanHook has been building a career in comics for the past decade. He is a former executive editor of Valiant Publishing and is a prolific scripter.

William Van Horn had been a children's book illustrator for many years when he decided to branch out into comics. After writing and drawing his own creation, NERVOUS REX, he tried a Donald Duck story. He is now one of the world's foremost Disney comics artists.

Mark Verheiden created and wrote THE AMERICAN at Dark Horse Comics. After a spell scripting for DC, he returned to Dark Horse. He now concentrates his writing mostly on screenplays, including TIME COP, THE MASK and others.

Charles Vess generally eschews regular, monthly comics — but as a writer and artist of many special projects, his work has won critical acclaim .

Henry Vogel is a part-time writer of comics, and the co-creator of SOUTHERN KNIGHTS and X-THIEVES.

Mike Vosburg has drawn more comics series, for more different publishers, than can possibly be listed in a single paragraph.

Martin Wagner is the creator, writer, artist and self-publisher of HEPCATS, one of the few funny-animal comic books with a character who is a rhinoceros.

Matt Wagner is the creator, writer and artist of the MAGE limited series and GRENDEL, an ongoing (but sporadic) series. He has also written and drawn numerous projects for DC Comics.

Mark Waid has been a journalist, scripter and editor in the comics field. He is currently writing freelance, mostly for DC Comics.

Chris Warner is a comics penciller with extensive credits at Marvel and DC. He is an art director at Dark Horse, and was the original artist on Mark Verheiden's THE AMERICAN.

Len Wein has been a writer and editor in comics for the past three decades. His stamp is firmly placed on Marvel, DC and Disney Comics.

Al Weiss has been a working artist in the comics field for the past twenty years.

Al Williamson is one of comics' top artists. His work has been published by EC, Marvel, ACG and many others. He has also put in stints drawing such newspaper strips as STAR WARS and SECRET AGENT X-9.

Bill Willingham created THE ELEMENTALS, an early success in independent comics. He has gone on to do art for a variety of publishers.

Marv Wolfman has written and edited all manner of comics for nigh unto thirty years now, mostly switching back and forth between Marvel and DC. In more recent years, he has worked for the publishing arm of the Walt Disney Company.

Bill Woolfolk wrote at least half the "name" comics series of the 1940s. Later on, he wrote for television. More recently, he is the author of a broad variety of novels.

Andy Yanchus is a colorist who has freelanced in the comics industry for years.

Tom Yeates has applied his distinctive pencilling style to such diverse series as SWAMP THING, AZTEC ACE, TARZAN and his own TIMESPIRITS.

Cat Yronwode (pronounced "Ironwood") is editor-in-chief at Eclipse. She is known for her outspoken opinions on comics and art in general.

Mike Zeck is a top penciller with credits throughout the comics industry.

Phil Zimelman is an airbrush artist who "was born with a piece of paper in my mouth." His work has graced the covers of a number of upscale projects from Marvel.

1. Breaking into the Business

For many, this is the most important chapter in this book. For some, it may be the most important thing in the world. It takes more than talent, more than luck, more in some cases than talent and luck put together. We'd like to lead off with three tips. The first is about attitude and demeanor. The second is quite practical. The third is both.

Bob Burden: I would like to address those creative kids reading this, who will follow in my footsteps, and perhaps overshadow my work someday. Be like rabid dogs, chase cars and bite the moving tires. Go bowling with the sun. Wear five hats at the same time. Learn to be important to yourself and forget how important you may be to others. Investigate, explore and reflect.

Also, avoid laughing at your own jokes when no one else is.

Rick Bryant: I tell aspiring artists to join the Graphic Artists Guild and to write the copyright office for free copyright packages. I advise them to look up people they admire in the phone book. Call them up, ask them questions, look at their work. The worst they can do is say no.

Sam Kieth: When I thought I was ready to get into the comics industry, I *wasn't* ready. And then when I thought I wasn't ready, I got in. So, if you think you're ready, you're probably not ready. And if you're thinking out there, "Oh, but I *am* ready to get in," you're probably not ready to get in. Until you look at how really bad you are, and how bad you can be — and I have lots of badly decomposed, poorly drawn bodies in my closet that I pencilled — you're not aware of the grind it takes to get in, all the bad art to get over.

And now that you're prepared, here are a few things you might try — and a few others to watch out for.

Jim Lee: I looked in the magazines and they had these conventions listed, like one was supposed to be the biggest one of the year, which was a complete lie. It was in New York, so I went up there with a portfolio of stuff. I was very lucky in that my work at the time had progressed to a level where the editors would look at it and say, "This is all right." If I had gone like a month before I think I wouldn't have gotten that.

Chris Bachalo: At conventions, I get asked about how to get into the business. I like to recommend that if you can go to school, go to school. It's definitely an asset. There's no conceivable way it can hurt you. There are things that you can learn in school that will help you get in the industry. They also teach you about business and other aspects of art that you don't run across in comics that can also be of help and give you an edge in a competitive industry.

Malcolm Bourne: The contact between the fans and the creators through letters pages and conventions is a wonderful thing and, in some cases, is a good way to work your way into the industry.

Mark Lucas: I find that letterhacking allows a person to build upon the experience and to discover different outlets and new avenues. Maybe first letterhacking, then apas, then fanzines, pro work, whatever.

Karen Berger: You can't walk in and think that because you've read a million comics that you know everything about the industry. There was one artist I worked with who, besides taking three months to draw an eight-page story, was pretty much of a wise-guy. He wanted another assignment, and I said "No!" He asked, "Why?" I told him, "Because of your attitude. You think you know everything." I told him that if he couldn't accept criticism, he'd find it very hard in life to work anywhere.

Malcolm Bourne: When I came up with my first series proposal, I took it to all of the independents, because I wanted to do a creator-owned book. The fact that my name was known from letterhacking was an advantage. Not in getting something published, as such, but I could go up to these people and they would know me. The name recognition alone wouldn't have gotten my piece published, if it wasn't good enough to be published — but I think it helped get my proposal looked at.

Chester Brown: I got the addresses of a whole bunch of underground publishers and what there was as far as alternative publishers at the time. At that point, I didn't know much about submissions procedures and sent off originals. I'd mail off the 10"x15" originals. I didn't know you weren't supposed to do that. I was lucky. They'd always mail them back.

MIKE FRIEDRICH

Rick Bryant: I came to New York and watched other people draw. I hung around the studios until they kicked me out. Working in production at DC got me a lot of valuable information that a lot of other artists still don't have, who have been in the business ten years and are making a lot of money. They don't know anything about production and I do. I wound up making a living for six years doing backgrounds.

Jon Davidge: We are always looking for new talent. We must continue to do so. On the other hand, we have a terrific amount of material in stock at the moment and if any writer or artist succeeds in getting our editorial people to commission them they'll probably see publication in about one year because we have so much material developed and ready to go.

Ramona Fradon: My advice to anyone going into cartooning is "Learn to draw!" Go to art school! Draw from a model! I see so many would-be cartoonists getting involved in ink techniques and drawing clothes. They can't draw.

Shel Dorf: My father gave me lettering lessons when I was a kid — which was ironic, because I hated lettering. I wanted to draw Mickey Mouse and all of those other things. He had once told me that even in the heart of the worst depression, lettering men had work, because businessmen needed "For Sale" signs painted or "Discount!" or "Going Out of Business" signs.

Ramona Fradon: Some women cartoonists I've spoken with experience what they perceive as some kind of discrimination in comic books. Whether it's true or not, I don't know. But my experience has been if you go in with something they want, they'll buy it!

Frank Frazetta: If you have a statement to make, you'll make it, and if you don't make it right away, you'll make it eventually. If you have nothing to say, get the hell out! Don't pretend to be a creative artist if you're not. If you want to fake your way through it, or pretend that you're better than you are by simply ripping off people and copying this and copying that, and then take all the credit for it, you really don't belong in the field.

Mike Friedrich: If you're interested in drawing superheroes and if you've got six good-looking pages, you can get a job tomorrow if you show those pages to the right person. It normally doesn't happen that way, but it *can* happen. As far as inking goes you tend to have to be the right person at the right place for that. We have found that it's most easy for us to represent new pencillers entering the business who want to do superheroes.

Keith Giffen: I had a week's vacation and said to myself — I'm not going back; I'm going to break into comics now. So, like an idiot, I decided I'd call everyone first. And if you call, they're never hiring.

Peter B. Gillis: I've humorously said that the difference between a pro and a fan is Steve Ditko. The first lesson in becoming a professional is to start liking Steve Ditko's work.

The above may have been said "humorously", but take it to heart. If you don't like Ditko's work, study it. Figure out what others do like about it. Once you do, you're on your way to a better understanding of the comics medium — an important part of professionalism.

Tom Lyle: Getting into the industry was a matter of doing samples, showing them to people at conventions and going to New York to show my work. I knew I could draw even when one particular editor told me I should quit drawing. Basically, I stuck to my own personal guns and kept with it. Persistence in this industry does pay off because there are so many people that want to be in comics.

***Ferd Johnson** offers the following tip on persistence:* Chester Gould would come up with a new strip every week. He was a bulldog at it. People used to laugh at him — I mean, other cartoonists. They'd say, "Here comes that would-be cartoonist." He finally hit on this detective thing. DICK TRACY was well thought out. He knew what he was doing. He went to Northwestern Police Academy for a year or two and studied police work. He really went all out for it.

Tom Lyle: Persistence of sending material, showing material and taking advice of others is important. You need to really draw or write a lot, You can't take one sample and show it over the course of a year.

Erik Larsen: Whenever people show me their samples at conventions and ask, "How can I get into Marvel or DC?" — the best answer I can give is, "Get in through the back door." Do stuff for whoever will hire you; you'll find you might get ripped off sometimes — I was.

Study your audience — figure out exactly what the people you propose to sell your work to want — says ***Batton Lash:*** I was taking my illustration portfolio around and wound up in a local paper in Brooklyn. They said, "Work something up and we'll consider it." At the time, the paper distributed mainly on Court Street. I noticed that just about every single office was an attorney, so I thought if these were the paper's readers I should do something about attorneys just to grab their eye, maybe get some response.

Jim Lee: Editors are often hiring personalities as much as talents, so the stuff that comes in the mail isn't all they want to see. When they meet you they get a feeling of what you would be like to work with. In a business like ours, that has a lot of ego clashing, really it's kind of nice when an editor gets a good feeling for a prospective artist.

Going to conventions is good — just showing stuff to the artists that are there and listening, really listening to what they have to say. I think a lot of people just sort of show their work assuming that people will love it, and when people find mistakes or flaws in it they can't really see it and so they don't think it exists. And most of the time I would say that artists or editors looking at a beginner's work are pretty correct in what they say, so you should believe them.

Rob Liefeld: When I've been in the offices, the few times I have, the editors have tons of junk on their desks — you have to see it, there's so much stuff in the offices — that when they get a package from some person they don't work with and whose name they don't know, it's going to take a lot for them to open that package, and even more for them to get back to you.

Go to conventions.

Frank Miller: The only ways I know of to break in are the ways nearly everyone knows of: conventions, presenting portfolios, and bugging people in that manner. It's tough out there right now, but on the other hand, there's an incredible number of comics being produced. There's also a greater demand for comics. I would say just make yourself known, get your work around. If you're going to submit something by mail, keep it very short because people will not read a thick stack of anything. Even a thick stack of drawings is going to put somebody off. Just try everything.

Tom Lyle: Some of the editors at big comics companies may hate me for this but I will say that the people that are really serious and want to break into the industry should pick a particular editor at the company that you are interested in and gear your submissions towards him.

Kevin VanHook: I wouldn't call and harass the submission people or the editors at any company. Even though everyone has the best intentions at heart, it's all too easy, if you've gotten the fifth call from a guy whose stuff only arrived yesterday and he's 40 envelopes down on the pile, your attitude to him is already colored. I wouldn't recommend that. I think going to conventions is good, showing your work at portfolio rooms.

It's tough. I can honestly say I never got work outside of one pencilling job at Marvel by cold submitting. I never got work through the mails in terms of just sending in photocopies. So I can't say from personal experience that that works.

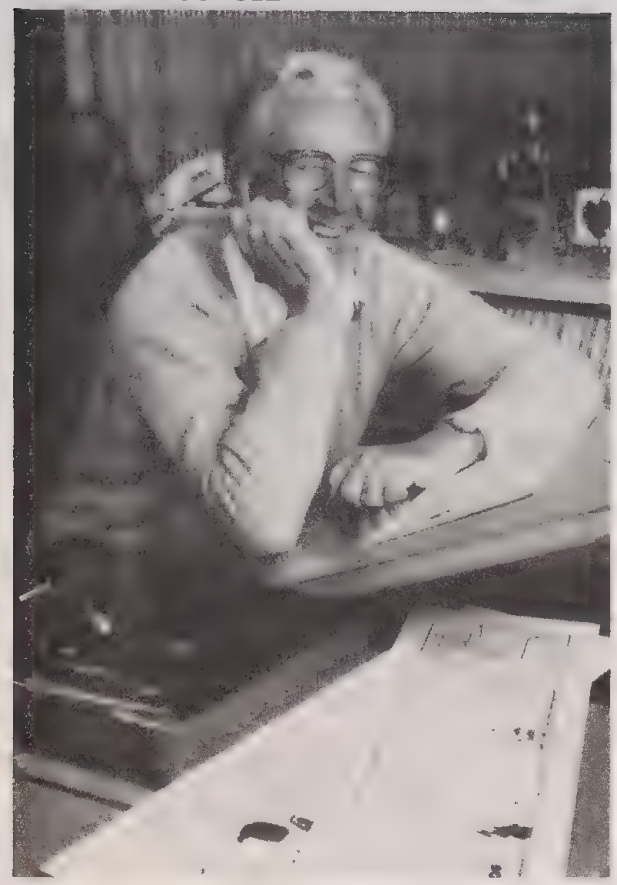
Todd McFarlane: I broke in the same way everybody else does — send your samples off for a year and a half and then finally somebody gives you a call and goes, "This ain't that [redacted]. We can give you a couple pages of work." One thing leads to another. Once you get your first gig, it's always easier to get your second gig and your third gig and your fourth. You just climb the ladder.

Frank Miller: I broke into comics by making a nuisance of myself, by getting the very generous help of Neal Adams not only in terms of him critiquing my work and advising me how to improve it but setting up the initial contacts I had in the field. Neal did that for a lot of people. He's not given nearly enough credit for the things he's done for younger artists.

Bruce D. Patterson: Practice! Nothing happens overnight. It takes a lot just to get to entry level.

Charles M. Schulz: You shouldn't start a comic strip by thinking of the characters first. You

CHARLES M. SCHULZ



should start trying to think of some funny ideas. Out of those funny ideas the characters will inevitably come. But most people don't want to do that. Most people want to draw 15 comic strips and send them to the syndicate and become rich and famous. I say draw 100 comic strips and throw 'em all away and start over again.

Scott McCloud: Anybody who's smart enough can come up with a totally different concept that has nothing to do with what came before and make it stick — provided he doesn't expect instant success.

Val Semeiks: Patience and perseverance are how you break into comics. And there's some basic skill requirements. If you want to be an artist, you have to be able to draw, and to tell a story with pictures. Being fast enough is also very important — every bit as important as having the talent to produce the work.

Marc Silvestri: An artist can show an editor a page and they can tell by one glance whether or not you know how to draw. For a writer, it's really hard to get somebody to sit down and look at something.

Jim Valentino: When you try out to be a writer, all you're allowed to give them is a little plot synopsis. They're not going to read a script that you give them. They're not going to read it, they just won't.

Mike Friedrich: As a writer, it's *extremely* hard to break into this business. It's very, very difficult to find an editor who has the time to even read your work to evaluate it. It tends to be that writers wind up convincing artists that they're good, and the artists talk to the editors.

Marc Silvestri: Joe Orlando's looking at these pages of mine and he says, "How fast are you? How long does it take you to do this?" I had a basic idea that you had to be faster than a page a month. I wasn't *that* stupid, so I lied — "Well, I do about a page a day." Literally, it took me weeks to do a single page. "I do a page a day" — I was desperate for a job. And he looks at me and goes, "You know, you're going to have to speed this up a little bit. Professionals these days usually do about two pages a day."

Louise Simonson: To get into comics — get really good. The quality of the people who are getting into the business now is so high that you just have to work as hard as you can to be the best you can be. You gotta learn to think logically and clearly, no matter what you're doing, whether it's in art or writing. Take all the classes you can and pay attention to everything everybody says about your writing and art. Show your writing and art to people who don't know what the heck you're doing, and get them to look at it. Your mother is always a good person, because your mother has no clues, generally speaking, about comic books. She's an intelligent but untutored audience. If your mother can follow the story you've written without any questions at all, or follow the story you've drawn sequentially, panel-by-panel, then you've told a clear story — which is the most important thing.

Frank Miller: For me, apas were good. It gets you involved and gives you an excuse to actually get some work done. It gets people to see it and criticize or encourage. You need both.

(An apa is an amateur press association — an organization in which members trade self-published material of various types. Some have used apas as a stepping-stone to prodom.)

Brian Stelfreeze *(who, by the way, draws some of the best-looking women in comics)*

admonishes us not to take such criticism too carefully — even if the guy giving it is working in the industry and you aren't:

I showed my art to a Marvel editor — I don't remember the guy's name — and he said, "Well, this kid can tell a story but he really can't draw all that well." And then he made a couple of other really harsh comments about the fact that my anatomy was way off and I didn't know how to draw women. His closing comment was that this kid will never work at Marvel — he simply doesn't have the Marvel style. I thought, "Well, he's an editor at Marvel; his word must be gold." I decided, if I'm going to do anything I'd best do it at DC rather than trying Marvel. Years later I met Bobbie Chase and Bob Harras and they said, "Oh, the guy was [redacted]; he didn't know what he was talking about." Both of them have given me jobs at Marvel.

But late at night I lie awake hoping that the guys at Marvel don't figure out that I can't draw women.

Dan Slott: I was in New York for a wedding so I decided to drop in at Marvel and impress everyone with my portfolio. No one was interested in it the least bit until someone finally asked, "Hey, kid, you here for the internship program?" It was like, "Yeah, that's what I'm here for." They had a policy that you had to be in college and receiving credit for the internship so I had a professor friend write a recommendation and say I was receiving credit — even though I had already graduated.

I was finishing up my internship when a position came open. The only problem was that even though I was perfect for the position they couldn't give it to the college intern — because they thought I was still in college.

Brian Stelfreeze: Back when I was 12, 13, 14 years old and was really serious into comics I didn't have the opportunity — or I didn't take advantage of the opportunity, to go to a convention and get a professional to say something about my work that might help me out. I really believe that if I *had* done that, I would have broken in a couple of years earlier.

At a convention, a *lot* of guys can go and talk to the people who are actually doing the work; I mean, if you're interested in the work you can talk to the creators; if you're interested in actually improving your own portfolio you can talk to the creators.

Another tip on persistence, this one from ***Roger Stern:*** Siegel and Shuster spent five years knocking on doors and pounding the pavement trying to get people to buy this character. The usual response was, "No commercial potential." Right.

(For the sake of possibly one or two readers who don't already know, the character Siegel and Shuster were trying to peddle was Superman.)

Todd McFarlane: I sent out 1,400 packages. I have, like, 700 rejection letters. I still keep them. I should take them around with me so when the kids go, "I sent out two letters and I don't know what the problem is," I can dump a bagful of rejection letters. People who write rejection letters are actually very nice about it. The people who think your work sucks just throw your stuff in the trash and never respond.

George Pérez: If a month goes by and you don't get an answer from someone — you assume the answer is going to be no.

Tad Pietrzykowski: I've sent submissions to Marvel *many* times, and I've followed all of the rules that have been outlined in the different letters columns, and not once have I ever received a reply. So, at this point, much as I've got *plenty* of stories that I'd like to pitch at Marvel, they've never replied to me in the past so I think I'll be inclined to go elsewhere.

Mike Vosburg: Before you even think about showing an editor your portfolio, do your own work, learn how to draw. You can't write a letter without knowing the alphabet; you can't draw a comic without knowing anatomy, perspective, composition, storytelling. Learn your job first, then show your stuff.

Marc Silvestri: I always tell the kids "Do a comic book, just a few pages to show you can do continuity and you can make a phone look like a phone." Just to show basically that you can tell a story in an interesting, cohesive manner — that's what I did.

Mike Vosburg: I don't know how many times I've looked at drawings by new guys with Todd McFarlane's figures, or whoever the latest guy is. That isn't going to get you a job. Don't come up with a whole comic book traced from a Jack Kirby comic book. They'll recognize it. I guarantee it.

Mark Waid: In order to work as an editor in comics, and this is the sad but unmitigated truth, you have to know somebody. That's all there is to it in the world. Very few people just get hired in off the street. In my case, I had done all

of this work for AMAZING HEROES over the years, doing pieces here and there, articles, interviews and such. I got to know a lot of people that way, such as Andy Helfer, Mike Gold and the big shots at DC. I also made sure that I met them at conventions. In other words, I made sure that they knew who I was and that I was interested in working there.

Andy Yanchus: One piece of advice would be to make friends with the editors.

Mike Zeck: Meeting professionals at conventions was helpful in getting some pretty good critiques. Also there was some interest in my work, and they began to remember me.

Julia Mather: Be aware of all the hours leaning over a typewriter or drawing board — of publishers' deadlines and 48 straight hours without sleep.

That's comic books.

*And finally — **Mike Royer** suggests you think twice before you even try to break in:* I think that if I knew then what I know now, I would have taken an entirely different career. I'd have been a gigolo.

Before You Break In — Know What You're Doing!

*Some of these tips on education are practical, others — perhaps less so. The one kicking off this section may seem extreme to some, and may — for whatever reason — not be available to all readers. But for what it's worth, **Louise Simonson** suggests:*

If I wanted to educate a child to do comic books, I would send him to a parochial school, because you're taught a very strong belief in a right and a wrong, which is what we're doing in comics. We're telling morality tales, tales of good and evil, in a cosmic setting. Some of the finest comics artists and writers were educated in Catholic schools, or raised as Catholics. Wrightson, Miller, Starlin — all death-oriented, extremely creative people. Also, you're taught to think in Catholic schools. If it were up to me, I would make every child who wanted to be a comic-book writer go to Catholic schools.

My absolute favorite myth as a kid was the one about the battle between the good angels and the bad angels, and Lucifer, for his pride, is cast out of heaven. That is a real comic-book theme. Most of our villains are classical Lucifer characters. They're proud. Some even have their hearts in the right place — sort of — but their pride

LOUISE SIMONSON

does them in. When you're a child and you're taught to believe in the devil, you get a feeling for magnificent villains.

This is probably something the Catholic church didn't *want* to teach, however.

I think that Judaism, also, has the feeling of myth and of history. I mean, a lot of what we're talking about is Old Testament stuff, and Stan Lee was able to bring that to his comics. That's why they were so good. Free will, the ability to make a free choice, is something that thematically you'll find in Stan's comics over and over. They were more than punch-and-hit stories. They were stories of character where people made important choices. There was an internal conflict which a character had to resolve. The conflict was *symbolized* by the punching and hitting.

And certainly, a lot of creators who didn't have a religious or classical education managed to acquire this feeling of myth and majesty.

Brent Anderson: Through a friend I found a teacher — Jim Smyth. He was probably the greatest influence on my development as an

artist. He was a classicist. He taught classical anatomy, classical perspective, color theory, composition, everything. He would say his feet were firmly planted in the 17th century — working his way back to the 16th.

It's *essential* to learn those things. If you don't learn them at the outset, you're going to have to try to learn them as you go along — that's a hundred times more difficult. It's like trying to build a house and the foundation at the same time. If you do manage to do it, then the house is not very strong.

Chris Bachalo: My first job involved painting ceramic pots. It paid $8 an hour, but I was doing art. It turned out to be a wonderful experience, because I learned how to work fast and still do quality work.

Kyle Baker: Milton Glaser is on the board of something or other at the School of Visual Arts. He likes to give students of SVA jobs, because he's an okay guy. So he called up the alumni society and asked if they had anybody who could draw cute bunny rabbits

That's where I got my education, at least my practical education. Now I pretty much know all the steps involved in putting together a printed book. So, like on DICK TRACY or THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS or everything after that, I do pretty much everything: I do the mechanicals, I do the actual typesetting, and I designed the typeface. I get to pick the process because I know all different kinds of printing processes, so I can figure out which one would best serve which book.

Ernie Colón: If beginners would just say to themselves, "I am going to perform this action one hundred times," right away they're no longer mystified by the first few efforts. That's the only way to approach any creative effort. You're not going to do it once or twice. You're going to do it a thousand times.

Jack Davis: At the University of Georgia, I had a good course in oil painting, which helped me not so much with oil painting but in learning color.

Jo Duffy: Don't just read comic books. Go out and *live* your life and learn from that. Read other writers. Read novels and newspapers. Go to plays and movies. You know, comic books are minimalism. What you see in comic books is only the surface, and if you want there to be any structure there, you've got to have learned it from some place other than comic books. I think that's where you get the difference between the good writers and the writers who may have it on the surface, but aren't really there. The good ones are the ones who have the whole novel worked out in their heads and then they figure out which ten sentences to give you, to make it work — as opposed to people who give you ten great-sounding sentences, and if you look underneath you realize they're just sort of floating there in the air with no legs underneath.

Frank Frazetta: I suppose you can learn to draw, you can learn to paint. You may even do very well at design, you know, whatever the ingredients are that make a nice piece of work. The last word, but far from least, is taste. I don't pretend to have the most perfect taste, but I think *that's* what separates the men from the boys: taste. Knowing what to leave out.

Dave Gibbons: If you want to draw like Neal Adams, don't copy the little marks that he makes on the noses and cheeks. Get a piece of tracing paper, and put it over the art, and with a big, clumsy implement — so you're not tempted to reproduce the fine lines — draw the big shapes and find out how he draws the big shapes. If you look at Will Eisner, for example, you'll find that

JACK DAVIS: Self portrait as a young man.

behind the beautiful brushwork, the plastic shapes that are in there tell the story by themselves. That is what I try to do when I look at other artists' work. I look at the totality rather than just the surface.

Paul Power: A lot of people who try to imitate or emulate Kirby, or just flat out swipe, get stuck on the technique of all of the little squiggles that he put in, and those sharp sort of jots between a biceps and forearm. They forget about the underlying mass and weight which Kirby *really* had.

Mike Higgins: I worked 9-to-5 in the Marvel production department, doing corrections, changing spelling, switching pointers — you know, "Move this panel here, cut this out, get this done!" But it's a type of job where you learn a hell of a lot about comics. Sometimes you're tearing pages apart and putting them back together. It was really a good place to begin. It gave me a lot of background information that I would never have if I began in an editorial job or started as a writer or artist.

Scott McCloud: I really enjoyed working at DC. I learned the ropes. It was a good working environment, nice people up there. I think I even got a lot of material subconsciously just by working with so many people around me all day long. The same cast of characters, day after day, may have influenced the way I wrote my own cast of characters when the time came. I really think a production job may be one of the best preparations a person can have. Maybe a lot of fans would think of it as a bit of a disappointment that they'd have to start there, but it shouldn't be. It helps.

Ferd Johnson: Frank King, who drew GASOLINE ALLEY, got me aside one time when I had just started with Frank Willard, and he said, "Ferd, if you want to learn how to draw, get yourself a sketchbook and go out and draw everything you see. Go up and down an alley and draw ash cans, telephone poles . . . anything, then go back home and try to duplicate it from memory. Then go back and check it out. Keep going back and forth and, within three or four trips, you're going to know how to draw those things."

Whilce Portacio: You learn from everything that you see. And you don't want to limit yourself to just comics. I got interested in drawing because of a tree that grew in my front yard. One day the tree struck me as being really cool and I thought, "What makes that tree totally cool to me?" Once you stop learning from things around you, you stop becoming an artist and you become what they call jaded.

Mike Kazaleh: The only training I ever had was drawing blueprints in a high school course.

Dave Gibbons: The advantage of being a surveyor is you sit at a board and draw. Some artists find background difficult — what's a window look like and how big should the door be? I could *make* you a window, if I had the tools. And the discipline of technical drawing certainly helped as far as lettering was concerned.

Bane Kerac: I'm not selfish enough to keep my professional opinions just for myself as some kind of a secret. I've always helped my younger colleagues, as my commitments let me.

Kyle Baker: People are very nice. You can go up to most professionals and ask them how something is done, and they'll help you out.

Kazuo Koike: You can't teach comics. Don't make a mistake on that point. You have to pull one's talent out, that's all. If you teach, you are just imposing your style on a person. In my school, we help a person to recognize his own talent, what he is the best at. If you are good at writing, then please become a novelist. If you are good for TV, choose another way. In the last 12 years of my educational experiences, I saw a hundred students graduating to a variety of professions — not just in comics. It's not a school to teach how to draw comics or face.

Goseki Kojima: If you can't earn a living drawing comics, do something else. I tried everything for a living — and that's taught me more about how to draw comics.

Joe Kubert: Art school gave me a good background in basic art and drawing composition and color and so forth, but for cartooning, I got my education in comics working in the comic-book field itself. No doubt about it.

Jim Lee: I advise tracing over other people's work just to see how they're actually drawing it. It's a real optical illusion sometimes. You look at figure work and you don't really notice how it's put together, but you start tracing it and you go, "Oh, my God, look at how thin this face is, how long these legs are."

Ken Lopez: I'd say go to school, and don't just study comic books. Somebody who wants to work here should know the fundamentals of everything, be it a letterer, an artist, a logo

designer . . . They should know what's going on outside of comics. I see a lot of comic artists today learning to draw from the comics, but they don't know anything about the fundamentals — they don't know how to draw real anatomy or anything like that — and that's wrong, because all they're drawing is someone else's interpretation. They might be taking shortcuts, but not knowing what's going on.

Joe Kubert: A guy who wants to get into this business and limits his knowledge to only drawing comic books, is also putting a limitation on his ability to make a living.

Scott McCloud: Everybody should do mini-comics. Take four hours some night. I don't care if you've never done a comic in your life, you can do a mini-comic. The main reason that mini-comics are so exciting to me is that they're so easy to do, to publish, in terms of actually constructing the thing, getting them printed up and all. They're in such a simple format that fans could be doing mini-comics all the time. Instead of buying the "right" bristol board, and pen sets, practicing thigh muscles — if instead they just started making comics and giving them to friends, giving them to people who had nothing to do with comics, doing them about their own lives, about things that happen to them every day that their friends have some reference for — people would start to develop their own way of telling a story, their own styles would evolve, just naturally. And suddenly there'd be so many more diverse styles than now, where everybody who thinks about breaking into comics thinks in terms of Marvel first, DC second. It won't matter that you can't draw a man to look like anything other than a cucumber, it doesn't matter, because it's all among friends. You get the full range of experience, from writing to art to lettering to printing, even selling, in some cases, and most of all *reader reaction*, which is where it all happens!

Alan Moore: I was doing ROSCOE MOSCOW, about this deranged alcoholic detective lost in a fantasy Raymond Chandler world, once a week for SOUNDS, a weekly music paper. It wasn't very good 'cause I can't draw, but I suppose my slogging away at the stippling, it acquired a certain demented energy. It did teach me storytelling — each week, being faced with a regularly defined white space to tell a certain amount of story in.

Charles Vess: I did a semi-weekly comic strip for the campus newspaper, and I was the graphics editor, which amounted to, on press night, going to the office and — in the space of several hours — cranking out all the spot illustrations.

That taught me deadlines. I know how to produce now. Too many artists sit around and piddle at it and piddle at it . . . I had a certain amount of that in me — but this showed me what the reality of producing artwork was like.

Todd McFarlane: I'm kind of like a sponge — I think most people are pretty much the same. You end up being like a sponge and pulling a couple of things that you like from this guy, a couple things from that guy, from that guy, and after hodge-podging it all together and playing with it for a couple of years you end up coming up with your own style.

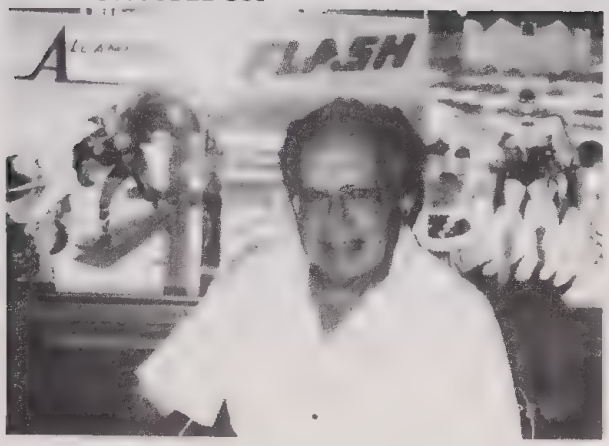
George Pérez: Don't stick to comics. Use other people as influences, as long as it doesn't become your sole reason for being. Don't be another George Pérez, don't be another John Byrne, don't be another Jack Kirby, don't be another anyone else. You can learn from them, but don't try just to be them. No matter how much you like their work, there still has to be a certain amount of style for yourself.

Pat Mills: British publisher D.C. Thompson is heavily paternalistic in the worst sense of the word, but they are the very best place to get a training in comics simply because they are so old-fashioned and there's nothing flashy about them at all. It's like learning the three R's. You learn what makes a story work in the most mechanical manner. They know how to put your finger on the pulse, and I learned more in the one year or so that I was at D.C. Thompson than in any subsequent period except for fairly recently. If you look at IPC, most of the people who have been responsible for comics are ex-D.C. Thompson people. That isn't just coincidence, it's that they give a far better training than anyone else.

Sheldon Moldoff: I started to draw on the sidewalks, in chalk, with Popeye and all of that, copying the comics. I don't know whether I had a special aptitude for drawing, but I liked to draw. And I started by doing all the cartoons. When I got into high school I went for the staff artist on the school newspaper, stuff like that, and entered contests in the papers.

There was a fellow living in the same apartment house in New York, when I was about 10 or 12, and he saw me drawing on the sidewalk in front of the building. He said to me, "Would

SHELDON MOLDOFF



you like to learn how to draw cartoons?" I said, "Yes!" He showed me how to start from circles, all the things like that. He was very helpful. Then he moved away. Years later I walked into the DC office and there he was — Bernard Baily.

Alan Moore: I learned a lot about timing dialogue in comics from acting, and I learned how to use words really effectively from poetry. There's a poem by Brian Patten called "Where Are You Now, Batman?" It has a haunting line about "Blackhawk has gone off to commit suicide in the hangars of innocence." It made you think, "Ah! If only they'd look at those characters with a bit of poetry in the comics themselves!"

Carl Potts: There was an excellent section in HOW TO DRAW COMICS THE MARVEL WAY on dynamics. In my own work I've never been known as a real dynamic artist as far as the action scenes go. I've always admired people like Simonson who can squeeze a lot of power out of the way they put the forms and shapes together. There was a section in there on what part of an action to show in your panel, the most exaggerated follow-through, say, of a punch. A lot of people will draw the intermediate actions. It's almost as if you have a series of animation cells showing the beginning-to-end of a specific action. A lot of people will pick the shot that's somewhere in the middle, and that's usually not the most dynamic one. I remember that chapter making a big impression on me.

Whilce Portacio: I would argue that the ones that have made it and the ones that we actually call "cool" artists are ones that have studied life, not necessarily a structured program through college or anything like that. Anyone that just learns from comics and studies from comics and does "rips" from comics is immediately exposed. If you go to the extreme like Leonardi, his stuff is styled to the max where it is a flamboyant interpretation of what life is; which is structured mistakes. And if you go about just copying someone's structured mistakes, you amplify those mistakes. I would argue that the ones that say they have learned their craft just through comics have actually studied life.

Charles Vess: I just read a lot! I do a lot of reading outside of the field, regular fiction, some science fiction, some fantasy, a lot of Scottish literature.

Paul Power: I don't think you get there just reading comics. You have to be well read. There's real literature out there — go out and read it. I really do wish people would take a chance and do something different because comic books could very easily fade out. It did before and it could happen again. So cultivate other areas.

Brian Stelfreeze: If anyone's getting into painting, I'd say study a lot of the Old Masters and try to figure out what they're doing. Even if you just have a bunch of colored pencils, try to figure out what they're doing, and that'll build a technique for you.

Mike Royer: At a party, for four hours I sat and drew sketches for everybody that stood in line. One of the perks of the party was that you got a sketch from a Disney cartoonist. I had to draw these things in like four minutes. You do that and you learn a lot about your abilities.

I can't tell you how many lunches I've spent drawing on the backs of napkins or place mats. You have to force yourself to draw in environments where you can't look at the last model sheet you did.

Joe Rubinstein: A big advantage for people who somehow get into the fringes of comic books — the assistants — is that we get to see the size of the paper, the pens, the tools. I've met people who literally thought that the comic-book art was done on either side of the paper, so that when you flipped it — there it was, just like a comic book.

You say, "What a jerk," like it goes without saying, but there are so many things that you don't really know anything about until you get there. When I was a kid, I spent hours doing practice comic-book pages with a pen, filling in blacks with a pen, because I didn't now brushes were used for anything but painting walls.

Then Joe Kubert came out with his SO YOU WANT TO BE A CARTOONIST page in his comic books, and I went, "Oh! Brushes, pencils, light on your page!" All the things you should know. But working around Continuity Studios, you got to *see* those things.

Tom Sutton: I went to work at a small commercial art studio. It was a typical commercial art studio, three or four guys with little green eyeshades and airbrush things. I was the "get the coffee, get the fuck out of the way" kid. But you got to do *everything*. You got to run the primitive stat cameras, paste up type, learn a little bit about this, a little bit about that — and these were things that were *never* taught at school.

I did a *tremendous* amount of work for them, but I never did any art. What is art? What are we talking about here? I drew lawn mowers, windows, cocker spaniel collars, all kinds of exotic things. And there was a lot of technical shit. You learned to use photo-screens so things would come out looking like pen and ink drawings. You learned to use all kinds of technical pens and all that kind of stuff.

Ken Selig: When you go to art school you spend four years there and the first six months you take this anatomy course where you're told about every damn bone that exists in the human body, how it connects to the hip bone and all of that stuff, where the muscles go and why they're there, how a thing moves inside the human machine. Today's cartoonist has *stopped* after those six months and he's taken that anatomy course and translated it over at the publication houses. The publishers, the editors — they should be given a kick in the pants! They accept that six months anatomy course that has been served up to them as cartooning!

Tod Smith: I studied what I call "The three K's" — Kirby, Kubert and Kane. If you've got a thorough knowledge of those three, you've got a real thorough grounding in comics.

Brian Stelfreeze: I worked at a movie theater. That was the greatest training that anyone could have for doing comics. In between the movies letting out and me tearing tickets, I would just go into the back of the theater and watch movies all day long; that's all I did; and after awhile, you start paying attention to individual frames, individual scenes, the action and motion, how things move along.

Mike Zeck: I've never regretted attending Ringling School of Art. In terms of comic art, if you were to take a course in comic art, you'd take everything I did at Ringling. The difference is that you'd also have that extra course in continuity or storytelling — which I didn't have. I was aware of storytelling, though I picked it up by reading comics, and going to movies with a more critical eye for picking up storytelling through the photographer's lens — I was aware of why they were picking certain camera angles and camera distances. It's the type of thing if you have a critical enough eye you can pick it up without being taught. In a way, storytelling is something you almost have to have a natural ability to do, like music. In most cases, it's easier to teach someone to draw than it is to teach them to better tell a story.

Randy Stradley: Probably the best thing that happened to me was that I was put into the new writers workshop that Paul Levitz was running. It covered a lot of the basics, but it was real helpful to see what other people were doing, to see what thought processes they went through, to be able to pick Paul's brain once in a while. I still sort of parrot some of the things Paul taught when I talk to people at conventions and they bring things to me to read.

BRIAN STELFREEZE self portrait

Kevin VanHook: If you're an artist, getting your training in terms of an art school background is recommended. I didn't. I was largely self-taught and learned through showing my work to professionals, asking "Is this right? What am I doing wrong here?" Learning pacing and so forth.

Charles Vess: I've studied many, many illustrators over the years. Each artist leads you to yet another artist. You follow the trail of influences just like you're Sherlock Holmes, sleuth of the aesthetic. Each and every artist has their own influences and in his turn influences others. None of us work in a vacuum, you know.

Martin Wagner: Nothing improves your art like drawing very regularly.

Bane Kerac: I nailed my feet under the drawing table.

John Prentice: After I did my first story I realized I really knew nothing about the medium. I had to learn how it was broken down and how they told stories. Storytelling is more important even than the artwork. So, I bought comic books and *studied* them. That's the way I did it. I would see how each fellow broke down the story and told it. I learned from that.

The Basics

The following may seem elementary to some — but perhaps not to others, and everybody has to learn this stuff some time! This section's keynote tip is delivered by ***J.M. DeMatteis:***

The same old line applies to any art — before you can *break* the rules you have to *learn* the rules.

Cat Yronwode: Rule-breaking for its own sake isn't sufficient reason to produce a comic book.

Neal Adams: To me, there is a certain amount of disrespect in not counting yourself as being a valuable party.

Chris Bachalo: It's an asset to know how to draw people naturally, to draw an apple and make it convincing, or a kid on a bike.

Mike Baron: You all better be writing every day whether you've got a place to stick it or not. If you're not writing every day you're not serious about being a writer. I don't mean literally seven days a week, but I do literally mean four to six days a week. And the second most important piece of advice I could give anybody would be to write for money. Do it anywhere you can, because that will make you a better writer. And that doesn't necessarily mean comics. The trouble with all these guys wanting to break into comics is comics is still a very small field and can't absorb them all, particularly not people who are training themselves specifically to write comics. It's kind of a Zen frustration but that's not the way to learn how to write. They should learn to write anything for money, for anybody.

Doug Moench: I even wrote pin-up copy for FLING magazine. That's the one with the heavy emphasis on absolutely gigantic boobs. I used to call the models "midnight cows." Some of the pin-up copy had to be written in the first person, so I would make up some name and guess the measurements as best I could from the photos and write stuff like, "Hi, I'm Cheryl, and you see this lollipop between my breasts? I'm going to lick it all day . . ." Not many writers would admit these things.

John Beatty: Beginners should get comfortable using a brush. If they can control a brush, then a pen is easier. When I started out in my fan days, I was a brush inker. Then when I started professional work, I slowly changed to a pen. I found after using a brush I had an easier grasp of the pen.

Simon Bisley: Art teachers didn't like me because I was too flashy, too stylized, and they wanted me to regress and go back to the roots of things. I couldn't see any point in that. I knew what direction I wanted and felt I was progressing quite well. Eventually, it became kind of a standoff where they ignored me, I ignored them. I just got on with it. They couldn't really control me. It wasn't that I was rebellious or anything. I was set in my ways and they weren't prepared to remove me from that state of mind. Which was a good thing, really.

Berke Breathed: Most of the syndicates get material from people who are clerks by day and come home at night and do some cartooning and send them some examples. Well, that doesn't give them a great deal of opportunity for feedback and the practical experience of the day-to-day grind of drawing. School is where you get that experience. You do it every day, and hone your skills, and by the time you get out of school you're ready to do it professionally, probably. You've learned a lot, you've cleaned up your artwork, you've learned how to write in three or four boxes, which is an unusual thing to do. I can't stress it too highly.

John Byrne: Marvel would often say

"Think Kirby," meaning Jack's storytelling, Jack's power, Jack's this, Jack's that, but *not* necessarily Jack's line quality or exact technique. If you say, "Think Kirby" to a young artist, you're going to *get* imitation Kirby.

Bill Chadwick: Have you read STARTING FROM SCRATCH, by Rita Mae Brown? The subtitle is "A Different Kind of Writers' Manual" — and, boy, is it! The only thing I knew about Brown is she wrote RUBYFRUIT JUNGLE, a counterculture hit in the '70s, so I expected some kind of Space Cadet's Guide on How to Write Good. The woman is, to my surprise, deeply grounded in Western literature, and her book is sort of the Marine Corps Boot Camp of writing books. For one thing, she demands the aspiring writer learn Latin well enough to read Virgil and Cicero in the original. Then she has a reading list that starts with the seventh century's "Caedmon's Hymn", goes to 1981 and consists of about 300 titles (one of which, THE COMPLETE SHAKESPEARE, could take a lifetime) — and the list is to be read in order so the writer can see how the language evolved.

Peter David: When you're a writer, you're almost an actor. You assume a character and you do your own interpretation: You have Mel Gibson's version of Hamlet as opposed to Laurence Olivier's version. Both are equally valid . . . but they're not on at the same time. Because you have different writers handling the same characters with different viewpoints, you have different takes.

J.M. DeMatteis: A lot of writers now could use Paul Levitz's writer's kit. It was just a basic kind of this-is-what-you-do. This is the caption. This is 5.5 panels a page. This is 35 words a panel. Real basic format stuff. This is how a plot is done. This is how this is done. It was a writer's guide, technically speaking.

It's always helpful for all of us who like to write and write and write and write and write to go back occasionally and count the words in each panel.

Kelley Jones: I like five to six panels a page. Ideally, four to five if you're doing action sequences.

Batton Lash: I try to keep the strip down to five panels now. After the book came out I saw, my God, I would try to cram nine panels in a week. It's a little bit more of a discipline to say everything you've got to say in five panels.

Stan Drake: You've got to have good drawing. If you've got the good drawing there, you can ink it with a toothbrush.

Will Eisner: I do not think of myself as a writer of formal history, or even as doing a gothic novel. It happens that my characters are set in a given period of time. But I'm dealing with something more enduring — human interaction, human experience.

Mark Evanier: Too many of the people entering the industry seem like they've never read anything *but* comics. They have an interesting way of combining a Johnny Romita style with a Jack Kirby style and a Neal Adams shading. But they do not bring to the field anything other than derivative comics.

Frank Frazetta: If you have talent, you can adapt in a whole bunch of areas. A painter is one thing, a draftsman is another, a singer is something else. A guy that knows he's got a natural talent, can pretty much adapt and make almost anything work. That's what I really have basically: talent. Sometimes I feel I have too much and I've never really stayed in one area long enough to perfect it.

Mike Friedrich: The real trick is quality, quality, quality. The people who are able to establish themselves as delivering quality work on a consistent, regular basis are going to be able to have work regardless of any collapse that might occur. The people who are erratic, who only deliver barely acceptable work while the material is in high demand, they're going to wind up with less work when there is a contraction.

Dave Gibbons: The fact that I learned to draw real backgrounds helped me give a certain authenticity to even outlandish backgrounds. Quite frankly, the easiest thing in the world is just to put down whatever fancy comes into your head. The artists I respect are the people who can draw — to use my example — the policeman outside the phone box, and make *that* look interesting.

Matt Groening: As far as being funny, for a long time as an amateur I tried to write what I thought would make other people laugh. I tried to fit my cartoons into a mold based on other cartoons. From Lynda Barry in college I learned to draw what made *me* laugh, and for me the best humor is humor with a very strong point of view — I take my point of view and I exaggerate it wildly, and try not to condescend to people. I assume that the reader is intelligent. I think that people are delightfully surprised at that.

Sam Kieth: I try to do the type of story I'd like at the age I was reading the book.

David Anthony Kraft: I've always felt that you can get somebody to clean up the copy — spelling and grammar — if you have that instinctive grasp for telling a story.

Erik Larsen: I never finished high school.

Sorry, kids, I probably shouldn't be saying this. It's just the way things worked out. I'm lucky in that I have the ability to do this. There are people who think they can draw comics, but I wouldn't recommend my route into it for them. It would be nice to have something to fall back on. Right now, all I have is my artistic ability.

Jim Lee: Right now I'm getting into a lot of different lighting effects and stuff like that. There's stuff I just never noticed before that makes certain people's art look really good. Like Klaus Janson, I never realized before all of the back-lighting and double lighting he does with his figures, and now I'm sort of looking into doing some of that. And that's what I like about this business, I'm continuing learning and I feel like just anything will go into my work.

Stan Lee: Heroes are either policemen or detectives or reporters, or something that'll make it easy for them to get involved in crimes. Now, if a guy is, let's say, a soda jerk, it isn't as natural for him, week after week, to get involved. But if he works in a newspaper or he's a news photographer or he's a cop or a detective or a member of the CIA or the FBI, well, then it's natural that he'd be involved.

Tom Lyle: Before you send your work to an editor you should show your art or writing to another artist or writer and get an opinion, because you have to be objective about your work.

Frank Miller: I sometimes listen to classical music while I'm writing but generally, writing is much more intense, I think, than doing anything else in this business. It's much more brain work, it's much harder, and it takes a lot longer. I can draw for twelve hours and feel okay, but if I write for six, my brain is completely fatigued.

Jeff MacNelly: The writing part is the concentration part and the real brain part. The drawing is fun, and that's mechanical, and I can do a week's worth in a day, I guess, if I was really pushed.

Val Mayerik: I'm oriented toward doing illustrative detail. I'm the kind of person who looks at an old person's face and finds that so interesting that I could spent a week just rendering that face. But if I allow myself to get too hung up on that illustrating comics, I'm defeating the purpose of doing a comic book, which is to go as quickly as you can from one panel to another and keep the story exciting. There's only so much detail comics can allow, before it becomes a negative element, an element that makes things thick and heavy.

Scott McCloud: I've really got to give some credit to a teacher I had at Syracuse, who was this mad prancing witch-doctor of a professor who was always going on about McLuhan and rock stars and even comic books, more-or-less randomly — definitely a product of the '60s. But he taught me, whether he meant to or not, to look at everything, and to look at connections between the things that I had learned. And so I had a real cross-media attitude about me when I did ZOT!.

Tom Orzechowski: The most important criterion of good lettering in comics is legibility. Anything else is just very nice window dressing. You have to be able to read the stuff.

Andy Yanchus: What is important in coloring is seeing the character against the background. You have to be aware if something is going to print well, or if it isn't going to print well. If it's going to turn into mud, or has the potential to turn into mud due to bad printing, then fix it.

Tom Orzechowski: Lettering isn't sup-

TOM ORZECHOWSKI

posed to be that visible against the artwork. If the copy is placed well, it's usually placed over things that don't make a lot of difference or are repetitive, like the sides of buildings or a cape that's swooshing in the air — if you see part of the cape, you get the impression that it's swooshing; you don't have to see the whole cape. So we're supposed to provide a tone that isn't that noticeable and that doesn't obstruct the artwork. And dazzle things up with lettering effects when that's necessary, but for the most part, we stay bloody well out of the way.

Will Eisner: What I'm about, in dealing with the human condition, is that, despite the environment, the human being is still human in the soul.

Steve Ringgenberg: I think Will Eisner is a model that all potential writers of comics should look at. Eisner's written some of the funniest, most poignant, most incisive comics that anybody has ever written, and is continuing to do just brilliant work. I would say he and Harvey Kurtzman are the two comics writers that have influenced me the most.

George Roussos: Everything — coloring — to make it right, it has to have composition, otherwise it's just all color thrown all over the matte. So there's a certain amount of organization. But it didn't stop my rebellious nature to do it the way I wanted. I still have a system of organizing colors. Otherwise, I don't care how wild the coloring is — if it's organized, then it's good. It's just when you do it haphazardly that it ends in chaos.

Ken Selig: A cartoonist serves a very strict function in society. He's trying to paint you a picture of life being lived *less* realistically than it is being lived.

Val Semeiks: Once you understand the basics of drawing with shapes, then you can learn how to draw animals or pretty much anything. I think a lot of comic-book artists have concentrated so much on people and faces and human drawing that they haven't spent much time on the other stuff.

Tom Sutton: It's the subject matter that should dictate the style. That's something that's never really gotten across too often in comics. The great old illustrators always knew that.

Anthony Tollin: You have to make sure that only the important things in a panel stand out. I've seen examples of competitors' comics where you have a hero colored in a fairly dull

WILL EISNER

outfit and in the back of the room you'll have a bright red telephone or a bright red chair.

***Henry Vogel** makes the familiar suggestion that you "write what you know."*

I've never been to New York — how am I gonna write a story about a city I've never been to? Atlanta was real close, it was a nice large city, and it worked naturally.

Marv Wolfman: Most people think they can write, because they know how to write a letter. What gets me are the fans who have been reading comics for years and should know better. It took me four meetings with one newcomer just to get his plot into shape. The idea was good enough that I didn't want to let it drop. After four meetings we finally got the plot in shape, so he goes home and writes it, full script. He has nine or ten panels per page, and he has 200 or 300

words per panel. I'm not joking! I counted! "How long have you been reading comics?" "All my life." "Look at a comic book! You can't fit that much copy on it. There should be some art!" People assume that because they've read comics, they know how to write them.

Bill Woolfolk: Spell out PLOTS: P — the Presentation. L — you're Launching it. O — the Obstacle. T — it's in Trouble. S — Solution.

Andy Yanchus: Beyond a good color sense, you have to understand the comic-book process. We've had fantastic artists come in here and completely blow coloring the comic-book page, because they don't know our limitations — what's possible and what is not possible.

Tom Yeates: I learned the old-fashioned, all-American technique of do a long shot, do a close-up, do a high-angle shot, do an up shot, and you've got a layout.

Mike Zeck: If anything, my coloring tends to be based on realism. If there's an influence at all, it's from sitting in movie theaters and watching television most of my life. The color you see in a movie is based on realism, but it's aided by flood lights and reflected lights.

Jim Lee: I look at my hands, hands grabbing objects. I actually have objects that I grab to see how the contour and the shape changes and then I try to carry that through into my work.

Phil Zimelman: I don't think anything is a one-man project. After I'm done with a painting, I need feedback because I might have missed something or forgotten an area. If someone else looks at it too, they can point out mistakes I might not see. I want the piece to have the best possible look and it's always good to have a second opinion. They say you're supposed to put the painting in a mirror and that way you can see it from a different vantage point. But that doesn't always work. Two people may not always agree, but they certainly have different viewpoints. After working on a piece for a long time you lose all objectivity. You need a second, or a third person.

Building a Career in Comics

Once you've broken in — what next?

Art Adams: Comic books are, like, the best place to learn how to draw things. I'd never drawn a person smiling before LONGSHOT #1. I'd never drawn a windmill, I'd never drawn a baby, and when you draw comics you have to draw backgrounds, you have to draw different-sized people, you have to draw emotions. Mostly, I was just drawing simple pin-up things. So comic books are a good place to learn.

Brent Anderson: If you go in to a comics company saying you're a penciller, that's where they'll put you. To become an inker or anything else becomes more difficult. I wanted to go in as a "Jack-of-all-trades" — to be able to color, pencil, ink, maybe even write.

Mike Friedrich: We have been a lot more successful with writers who have gotten their foot in the door one way or another, even if it's with a small independent publisher. Then there's at least a comic book you can read. You can read a comic faster and get a sense of whether a writer is good, even if the artwork is terrible, than to read a script.

Bruce D. Patterson: Being naive about the business, I didn't know that people use rulers for backgrounds and gun barrels and stuff like that. So the first comment I got was, "You didn't use a ruler," and I said, "Was I supposed to?" I've learned a lot since then. I use a ruler.

Steve Bissette: You have to have a monthly book in order to establish yourself. You do that as one of the people in the team. Even with Frank Miller — he was the penciller on DAREDEVIL and then he worked himself into the position of being able to take over the writing, but he was still a member of a team, with an editor, inker and colorist. After that, he was successful enough to be able to move on to RONIN — his own baby.

Jim Salicrup: The best time to get a job is when you already have one.

Gaylord Dubois: As a Bible-believing Christian, I have prayed for guidance in every book and every comic that I have written. My job as a writer of books and comics came as a direct answer to prayer.

Mike Friedrich: We tend to be more enthusiastic about proposals that are constructive in a general sense, having as an underlying theme positive, constructive, human values. We have a much harder time with more nihilistic, destructive concepts, of which there's quite a bit out there. Have we drawn the line against representing one of them? Not yet.

***Neil Gaiman**'s next tip is just a lengthy way of saying don't make proposals about the most popular characters — they're already taken.*

We heard that Karen Berger and Dick Giordano were talent scouting. We went up. This

was me and Dave McKean. We showed them the stuff we were doing, they said, "We love it, what do you want to do?" I started listing characters, and they said, "No, they're taken." I started listing really obscure characters, and they said, "No, somebody's doing them." In desperation, I said Black Orchid, and Karen Berger said, "Blackhawk Kid?" and I knew I was in business.

That was just a wild shot in the dark. The only thing Black Orchid had going for her was that nobody remembered her. She was also a complete and utter cipher; that was one of the good things about her, was that she didn't have an origin, she didn't have a secret identity, we didn't know anything about her. I sat on the train on the way home, trying desperately to come up with something that would make BLACK ORCHID interesting, trying to get a handle on it.

On the other hand, ***Kelley Jones*** *offers a more positive reason to go after the less stellar properties:*

There's a challenge in taking a second-tier character and getting anyone to pay attention to it. There's nothing hip about Deadman. But I'm still able to sell quite a few copies.

Bob Hall: I think everybody in comics, in their first year, panics and says, "My God, how did anybody ever make these deadlines?" You swipe anything and everything you can because, first of all, you can't figure out how the hell you're ever going to get it done, and secondly, you're always convinced you're going to bring this stuff in and somebody's going to say, "That isn't the house style. That isn't how Marvel does it." I'm convinced there's a legend of a house style that's grown up by people convincing themselves there has to be one and they'd better do it.

Bob Kane: Hindsight and foresight — a lot of times you don't know, at the very beginning, where it's going to go.

Mike Friedrich: We're very much a young person's business. Most of the people who produce comics are in their twenties, to some degree in their thirties, and the people who are in comics in their forties tend to be the ones who have been able to maintain their enthusiasm.

When you're new, you hear a lot about how good or bad you are and what you need to work on. Once you're established they stop talking to you about that and generally focus on when you're going to turn it in. So you have to be self-motivated as a creator to do better. And if you don't, then you're going to find yourself out of a job in a couple of years.

Dave Gibbons: I think everyone is born with artistic talent, but it's like a war of attrition — how far you can go until you give up or become discouraged. And I think I was lucky in the sense that I didn't become discouraged. I was always getting somewhere.

Erik Larsen: Each time you do something for a company comic, it gives you something you can show to somebody else.

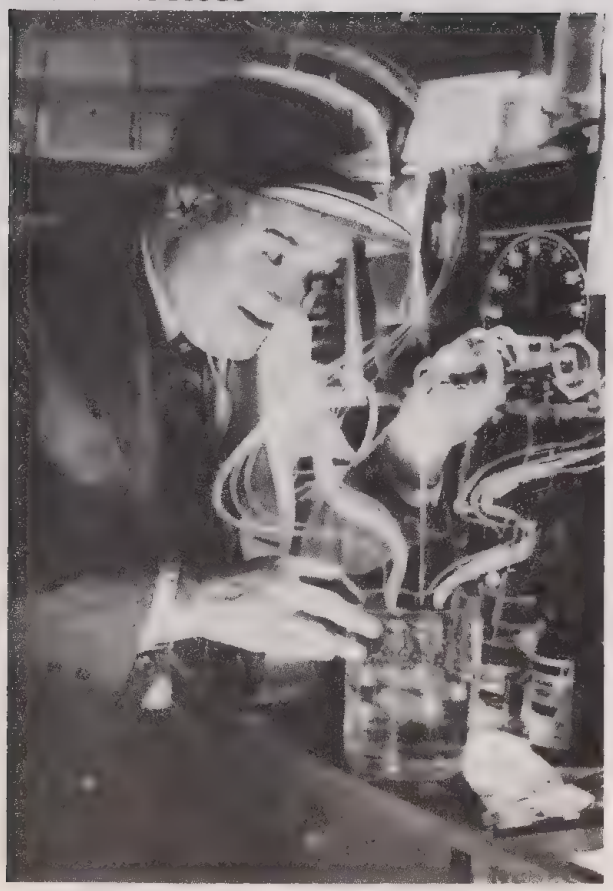
Todd McFarlane: If you want to do superhero stuff, take the route I took. Go out there, work on a book. The longer you stay on any book, the better it makes it when you do your self-published book. I always knew that, even though I wanted to self-publish four years earlier, the longer I hung around, the better I'd be in the long run. Learn your trade, and when you leave you've a built-in audience going with you.

George Pérez: Marv Wolfman was a harsh critic of my work. I was trying things I wasn't equipped to do, wanted to do, but didn't know how. And that was better than any art training I could have had. I got all this hands-on art training for nothing, at least a million dollars worth of advice — for nothing. And I thank them all for my career; they've done a lot to make me George Pérez, the artist. Once I got rid of George Pérez, the proud, young upstart — as in the young artists who're so into drawing that they can't accept the fact that they still have to learn.

John Prentice: I was looking for work. I was doing some illustration, and it never even

BOB KANE

GEORGE ROUSSOS



occurred to me to try the comic books. Then some fellow sent me up to a comic-book publisher and they gave me my first script. It was a romance story, and I took it in and the art director seemed very pleased with it. The next time I saw him he gave me another script and said, "Look, don't draw so many *heads*." I had done practically the whole story in *heads!* So, I went out and I bought a bunch of comic books and started seeing how the guys laid them out, how they broke down the story. That's the way I started with comics.

John Romita Jr.: I was given great opportunities, but my father didn't hand them to me. My name may have hurt me more than it helped. People figured, "Daddy's here, so Sonny will get work." I know my father was concerned with charges of nepotism. He didn't say anything, just kept himself separate from my career and let me deal with the editors and other artists on my own. His attitude was, "He's got to prove himself — he can't get work because he's my son."

George Roussos: As long as somebody likes your work, you'll survive in this business.

Jack Kirby: I think they're not giving the younger people time to grow, to develop as editors, writers, artists. One guy told me, "I got the CAPTAIN AMERICA book — and you watch what I do with it!" Three weeks later he's working on another book. So how much time has he got to develop his Captain America style.

Tod Smith: I picked up a helluva lot of information doing backgrounds for Gil Kane. I wish I could have been taking notes while doing the backgrounds. I learned, first, his approach, which is very classical. A thorough grounding in structure — structure in the figure, in just about everything. Expressing a three-dimensional quality by knowing perspective. Foreshortening, which gives you depth and volume. He's very learned in all these important technical areas.

The other thing I picked up from Gil Kane that was very important was motivation. I took some of my work out to show him, and he said he saw a basic talent underneath it all. But he said, "If you're going to make it in this field, you're going to have to bust your rear-end, because there are a helluva lot of guys trying to break into comics. Unless you're totally committed, you're not going to make it."

Tom Sutton: I took the strips that I had from STARS AND STRIPES, went and met Stan Lee. Stan looked at my stuff. I don't mean he just looked at one page; he looked at *everything!* He said, "Okay, you can draw. Now I'm going to show you how to do comic books."

Kevin VanHook: I turned in competent work, on time. And it snowballed from there.

Bill Willingham *warns us not to quit our day jobs prematurely:*

My artwork attracted the attention of someone working at Marvel, and this person — who will remain nameless — talked about how I had terrific artwork and said they'd be giving me some work, soon. It might take as much, this person said, as two or three weeks, before I got a job. Not really knowing my way around Marvel, I did not realize at the time that this person did not really have the authority to hand out jobs, wasn't really an editor in the position of being able to assign work. So, not knowing this, I quit my job, moved to New York, and sat and waited for the Marvel Comics jobs to come in.

A few weeks later, when I called this person again, I had to explain who I was. And at that point they explained to me that this person was not in a position to assign any work.

II. Telling the Story

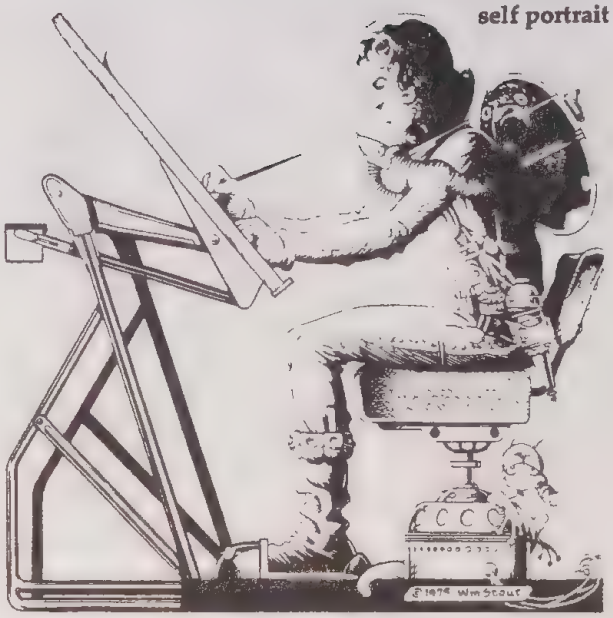
This chapter concerns what is at once the most important — and one of the least understood — aspects of comics creation. Its central necessity is as obvious as the air we breathe to every single person working in the comics industry — and like air, it can be so much taken for granted that to those outside the industry it is utterly invisible. To say that the art in comics serves the story is an understatement. Everything *in comics — the words, the pictures, the coloring, the lettering, even the very paper it's printed on — it all serves the story.* ***Bill Stout*** *sums it up thusly:*

I was hanging out with people who talked about comics and stuff. They kept talking about "storytelling" and I kept wondering what the hell it was with this "storytelling" thing. You know, I'd look at the Frazetta stuff and think, "God, that's the secret, you just draw wonderful!"

Everything was "storytelling," and they kept bringing up the same names over and over and over: Toth and Kurtzman and Eisner. So I figured maybe I should look at these guys and see what they were talking about, and try to get my little peabrain to absorb some of this. I'd look at the Toth stuff and I'd see his beautiful designs, and I noticed that everything was very clear as far as to what was being told in the story, but I couldn't figure out how. For me that was such an elusive concept. It wasn't something I could put my finger on, like, say, drawing a hand — "Well obviously he drew that finger too thick; he should change that." It's more of an abstract intellectual concept.

So I took Harold Kramer's advice, when you don't know about something but you know someone who is good at it, then you look at all of his stuff that you can find. A lot of it you'll start to get by osmosis. Even if you don't understand it, your brain will take it in and start to digest it. So I started collecting all the Toth I could find, and Kurtzman and Eisner. Then it started to dawn on me — "Gee, he staged this scene this way because he wanted to achieve this kind of psychological impact, and it also sets up a rhythm and a pacing so that it's almost a film-like time-span structure that delivers that story point with a particular kind of impact. Oh, yeah, I get it. That's how you tell a story."

BILL STOUT
self portrait



Draftsmanship isn't the secret of storytelling. It's the design and the staging and sometimes the size of the panels.

Here's some more about the importance of storytelling, what constitutes a good story, and how you go about making one . . .

Brent Anderson: As I watch a movie, I break it down into what can and can't work in a comic. I do the same when I read a comic. I read and say, "How would I shoot this? How would I do this differently to get more impact out of it?" I'm constantly analyzing and cross-referencing the two media.

John Arcudi: I have definite visual images in mind as I write, for each page and for each panel. I think that helps the artist.

Chris Bachalo: Every time I approach a different story, I try to put myself in the reader's position and make it interesting for them to look at.

Kyle Baker: I find the easiest way to write is to put the characters into situations in which they don't belong, and the comedy comes out of that.

Clive Barker: I wish there were more character and less brutish and repetitive violence. If the story isn't there, if the narrative isn't there, if the characters aren't there, I'm not hooked. It can have action; these aren't

mutually exclusive. It can have as much action as you like as long as there's good character stuff going on.

Dan Barry: The stories in RIP KIRBY are terrible. I said to Sylvan Byck, the editor at King Features, "Doesn't the guy who writes this *know* the *secret* of writing a mystery for comic strips? You can't do Agatha Christie, you can't do who-done-it, because it takes three months. They'll sit around for an hour to find out, but they're not going to sit around for three months." He said, "What do you mean — how else do you do a mystery?" "You *tell* them who's doing it in the *beginning!*" I couldn't believe they'd never thought of that! I only learned later that Sylvan was writing it.

Karen Berger: Storytelling is half the battle in this medium. Of course, you have to know how to draw, but you don't have to be technically perfect. Some people are wonderful illustrators but their storytelling puts you to sleep. You have to be able to make a story move, among other things.

Bob Burden: Playing fast and loose with reality is a concept that I invented that basically entails not becoming possessed with trying to make your story just like everything you've read before.

The story-making process is a very complex thing. On the one hand, you've got total liberty to do whatever you want. On the other hand, you're limited by the fact that it has to be understandable, and it has to be within the realm of your imagination. And I've just trained myself to have a very loose, very open imagination.

Sal Buscema: If you can illustrate a story and get it across to your reader without any dialogue, captions or balloons — just with the pictures — then you have told a beautiful pictorial story. That would be the ideal situation. Obviously, you can't have that all the time, because some sequences of a story will demand a certain amount of explanation. If you can tell your story with just your pictures, and make it dynamic and dramatic and moving — and grab your reader — then that's storytelling and you're doing your job.

Jon Davidge: I've never believed that comics should be complicated. The great comics writers and artists could tell very complicated stories, but in a *comprehensible* way. Brian Bolland is the leader in being able to tell a story in a way that nobody's confused. The writers we use do not try to confuse the readers.

John Byrne: I like to build to the first appearance of the characters. I don't like the whole thing of Superman flying to the rescue on page one, and then that little mini-adventure ends by page three, and then we go do some Clark Kent stuff. I would rather find a dramatic way of doing the Clark Kent stuff, so when he opens the shirt, or runs into the phone booth, this is a *dramatic event*, and we haven't defused it by starting with Superman.

Ernie Colón: When I write a story I want the locale and the environment to be such that you can't really take the story and set it anywhere else. You can't write a story that takes place in the early 1900s in Boston and transpose that story to a western or a science-fiction setting.

Peter David: The whole key to writing is not necessarily giving the readers what they want, but what they should have. If that's patronizing, so be it — but the fact of the matter is, if you always give the readers precisely what they want, they will very quickly become bored and go away. My feeling is, "Let's do something that's really going to try to goose them a little; make them think."

Jon Davidge: Our first priority is to publish comics. If the artists then sell the artwork to a gallery, it's great! But we have to be careful editorially that first of all it's designed to be a good comics page, and that the story's told properly. The strength of 2000 AD for many years was that the stories were superbly written and the artists were able to tell the story graphically. One of the first things you find with inexperienced artists — even if they're brilliant in doing the figures, brilliant with drawing or painting — is telling the story is often a problem. We are extremely insistent that the stories, the way they're told, are the equal of the art. It comes second to frame a beautifully drawn panel.

Don Rosa: My stuff is too cluttered to be appealing to the eye. But I never worry about artistic layouts — I'm only interested in telling a story. I cram in as much plot and dialogue as possible on each page, and I always jam all the word balloons into the top of the panel to keep the drawings from being cluttered up. This is not "The Marvel Way to Draw Comics," but I don't care.

Larry Hama: If I can't understand what's going on by looking at the pictures then I don't even bother to read it. I think that's the bottom

line. If you can't figure out more than 50% of what's going on simply by looking at the pictures, something's wrong with the comic book.

Tim Sale: If you are doing a silent sequence, you need to be a lot more careful that you are showing everything. I'm very fond of silent sequencing. You should be able to get the bare bones story just by looking at the pictures.

J.M. DeMatteis: One of my theories is that a lot of 22-page stories can be done in eight pages.

Bojan M. Djukic: When somebody makes that fateful decision, "I want to be a comics artist," he's hooked usually by the technique and drawing skills of his chosen idol. Most people aren't aware of that sequential thinking, but instead they're just putting illustrations together one by one. And that's not story-telling!

Arnold Drake: There were two things that I always kept in mind. One was to make people sound as much like real people as I could, and the other was to give them motives as much like real people's as I possibly could.

Peter B. Gillis: Character is really the way a person reacts to the society around him. I think it's Aristotle who defines character in drama as the way a person reacts to a situation other than the one he finds himself in. A character who just advances the plot is totally characterless.

Larry Hama: I think there's more drama to be had out of situations with a person who has limitations.

Kelley Jones: Generally, I always take something that has character motivation, a beginning-middle-and-end, some reason to be put to paper rather than just make money. The bottom line is, in ten years, are they even going to remember it?

John Byrne: What I usually do, what I try to do on a regular basis, is evolve the story before I insert the villain. It's less important — in terms of who the characters are — that they're fighting Dr. Doom, than *how* they're fighting Dr. Doom, what frame of mind they're in when they're fighting Dr. Doom.

Neil Gaiman: If you're writing a novel, you can be halfway through it or more before you know what it's about or how it's going to work. You get to the end and you realize how the end fits together, and you go back to chapter one and you plant all the clues that make it obvious how it's going to end. When you're working on a monthly comic, that's not feasible because apart from anything else, when you get to the part where you realize what it's all about and how it ends, everybody's already read the early parts and you can't go back and change them.

Dave Sim: There is a quality to doing an extended story, in terms of getting to know the characters, and amazing things coming out that you are really convinced have nothing to do with you.

Michael Gilbert: Pretty pictures alone don't do it. My first and foremost interest is telling a story, getting your eye moving, and holding your interest. Close second, are the pretty pictures.

Kelley Jones: There are certain things that you have to have in the artwork. Establishing shots and things like that.

Archie Goodwin: My feeling when I was writing for Warren was that writing in comics should be a little like good background music in movies. It makes a contribution that works toward the success of the overall piece, but you shouldn't specifically notice it. If suddenly the reader is aware and says, "Hey, this is great writing!" then you're maybe calling more attention to it than you should. What the reader should be thinking is: "Wow, this is a great story!" and not be conscious of the writing for the writing's sake.

Alan Grant: It's probably a lot faster to write action stories than it is to write stories that go into any sort of detailed examination of the human soul or motivations for human actions. British comics are turned out on a weekly basis, and when you're limited to four, five or six pages in which to say something, you've got to really keep things moving fast and keep them funny to keep the reader coming back to buy the next issue.

Neil Gaiman: When a story comes out over seven or eight months, you lose just the way that it is all one story. Because if you're reading it over seven or eight months, you get one episode of it that is pure, out-and-out horror, followed a month later by one episode that is pure, out-and-out fantasy, and it's sort of as if somebody's saying, "Well, I'm making a sandwich here, and the first thing we have is one piece of rye bread." And you wait a month and they say, "And we've got peanut butter." And you wait another month and they say, "And we've got cucumbers." What? Huh? This is too weird. But when you're actually just sort of handed it as a sandwich, it works fine.

JACK KIRBY

Jack Jackson: When I set about to do something like COMANCHE MOON or LOS TEJANOS, I always have at least an outline in my head for the complete project. This is why the individual books don't particularly stand up well on their own. They're really just a part of the whole story, broken up arbitrarily into 24, 32 or 48-page segments. This, unfortunately, is necessary for an artist to sustain him/herself during the lengthy time that it takes to finish an "epic." It's hard to get a publisher to pay for a long, strung-out trip, and how else do you survive for three years unless you can get money, book by book?

I don't know how an artist can avoid this "segmentation" of his work, unless he's prosperous enough to lay back and "do it right" — a condition rarely found in the marketplace.

Matt Groening: I am a writer mainly, That's how I think of myself, and I have minimal drafting skills. I try for clarity despite the huge numbers of words in my stuff, I do try for clarity of the design, and readability.

Larry Hama: I try to have a real solid resolution at the end of each book. But I like to keep some plot threads going.

Rick Hoberg: As far as storytelling is concerned, you should always give only the information the reader needs to tell the story. Once you start getting "verbose" about it visually, you are actually defeating your own purpose.

Ferd Johnson: You can take a couple of toothpicks and have them talking to each other, and if they're funny they'll go.

Kelley Jones: From my point of view, anything has to have a point. I don't like stereotypical storytelling. I don't always like a neat ending. I like knowing someone's doing something in a book for a reason.

Bane Kerac: I live along with my characters and creations. If they have no idea what's going to happen on the next page, beats me if I know what the hell's going on . . . The last panel inspires the next one and so it goes until "The End."

Jack Kirby: When Captain America was in a fight it was me doing a ballet. Fantasizing myself beating five or six guys, when in real life, of course, I'd get smeared! But in this fantasy life which I dramatized, I would sock one guy while the other guy slid under the table and the third guy fell against the stove. And then they would come back and there'd be follow-up movement — and that was exciting. The reader caught that.

Alex Kotzky: If a person is really mad it's good to have him smiling. It's in such direct *contrast* to what he's saying that it'll startle the reader. And also, in an action scene, where you'd think the guy would project himself forward, he really goes back because that's when he summons up all of his energy.

A letter in COMICS INTERVIEW #117 from your humble editor offers an example, from an issue of SUPERMAN, of something to avoid in comics — i.e., if you're telling a story, make sure one panel follows another logically and without gaping holes.

Don Markstein: Lois Lane is captured by bad guys. In one panel she's just found herself in their presence. In the next, nobody seems to have shifted position and their conversation continues without missing a beat — but her hands are tied. That's just plain sloppy.

Kelley Jones: If there is a fight, you have the bruises and the cuts afterward.

David Mazzucchelli: When I've written my own story and plot I approach it like a director. I look for the best way to bring out the important aspects of the story visually in terms of composition and emotional intensity.

Scott McCloud: In one page, I had certain figures on the right-hand side, which gave the ending of the story a very abrupt feeling, and I wound up reversing the layout of the entire page — right through all of the previous panels, as well — just to get that beat on the left-hand side in the last panel, so that there would be more of, I guess, a reverberation of the scene.

Pat Mills: I try for a mixture of strong story and strong action and to keep that on the boil is a lot harder to write than a really crass story which is all action. I could do that without any problem.

Doug Moench: If a film is nothing *but* action, the action swiftly becomes meaningless on every level other than the purely kinetic. It becomes a pinball game, not a movie or a story. I'm a firm believer that contrast is the key in everything from the texture of food to the peaks and valleys in melodrama. Without sickness, you don't appreciate health. Without hunger, food is tasteless. Endless non-stop action doesn't quite make it with me. The action ultimately numbs me. If I've had no opportunity to get to know these people, to love or hate them, why should I be happy or sad when they're bounced five hundred feet through the air?

Women seem to understand this principle of contrast very well, particularly in sex. In a general sense, they respond to love stories more than they do to porn. And in a specific sense, they tend to prefer a process of gentleness *building* to a climax, and it makes perfect sense. If you start out rough, you got nowhere to go.

Scott McCloud: Comedy and tragedy don't always wait for their turn. Sometimes, they come up right against each other. Sometimes they overlap. And I think that's something that most of the writers and artists that I like have always understood. One of the nicest things about THE SPIRIT is that it always had a lighter side and a serious side, and they didn't have to be relegated to different bookshelves, they were all part of the same work. If you were laughing on page 12, and something really tragic happens on page 14, you're more likely to be affected by it, because you've come that much further down.

Jim Mooney: I worked in the Eisner shop and Lou Fine was there, and at that time I really didn't appreciate how vital Eisner's stuff was. I gravitated more towards Fine because it was mannered and it looked more elegant and very graceful. In the long run, I realized that Will Eisner told a much better story, that he was much more of a comic-book artist. But Fine was extremely appealing when you're young and fresh out of art school.

Alan Moore: I like building up situations and characters so that when something does happen — even if it's only a little thing — it has that weight and that power.

John Cullen Murphy: Surprises? That's the name of the game. Milton Caniff always said you have to have a cliff-hanger.

Fabian Nicieza: If I have strong point as a writer I think it is the ability to plot a story so that it has an effect on the characters. I try not to let any of my stories just be about confrontations. I try to have the confrontations mean something to the character in the story.

Rick Norwood: The trouble is, in my opinion, that the fans have taken over the comic books. They're comics fans, they've grown up on comic books, some of them have read nothing but comic books. They are writing comic books and drawing comic books *for* other comic-book fans to enjoy, with a lot of little fan references and fan jokes and fan names and characters in the background; and so they say the Cosmic Cube has reappeared and all the comic-book fans get a tingle because they know what the Cosmic Cube is and what the Cosmic Cube does. But a person picking up a comic book for the first time, the reference to the Cosmic Cube is going to go right past him. How many times has the *climax* of the story been the revelation of who the villain is? You get this full-page panel for the last page of the story and it's Magneto, and you get a *chill* if you know who Magneto is, but if you've never heard of Magneto before, this is no climax to a story.

Denny O'Neil: We try to create a sort of life for these characters that is consistent and logical. What I try and do as an editor is leave it loose enough so that my creative people don't feel that everything is plotted out for them ahead of time, and especially leave it loose enough for somebody to have a better idea. Sometimes in the act of writing a story, that process will generate other ideas. If they're good, we want to be able to accommodate them. We don't want to be so bound in by something we thought of six months earlier, that if Doug Moench has a terrific idea, we can't find a place for it.

John Ostrander: I don't think you have to get very hoity-toity. People say, "Yes, comics are

a major art form." Well, who gives a damn whether it's an "art form" or not? When you start dealing with it as an "art form," you start getting pretentious. The question is, are you telling the story and are you telling the story well?

George Pérez: Crossovers, I feel, are terrible for creativity. It requires so many compromises that they shouldn't have to exist. I've been on both sides, from the book that had its continuity interrupted, to the book that was responsible for it.

Chuck Pfarrer: Whenever you've got a monster the *less* you see it the *better!* It's like the first ALIEN, I got an ulcer *waiting* for that thing to pop out!

I figure if you underwrite something it's better than just beating people over the head.

Bob Pinaha: Even the shapes of the balloons help convey the composition of the whole page and help move the story along.

Wendy Pini: When you have a highly emotional scene in mind for a long time and it finally comes time to put it down on paper, if your own emotions aren't connected with it, you could fall back on sentimentality or certain cliches to get it across. I've always been very afraid of that, particularly when the emotions are running very high in ELFQUEST. I also want the emotions to be very real, very immediate.

Steve Rude: Some readers may be upset with changes in NEXUS. Mike Baron and I regard our stories as a by-product of serious, mature thinking. In *life* there are changes that happen, *natural* changes that just come about as a matter of personal evolution — thus it is with our stories. We can either go with that directional sense our instincts are supplying us with, or do it in a more *contrived* way, which would be a serious mistake.

Paul Power: In the old comic strips they always kept the hero and heroine apart. They always kept that tension. In a movie about comic strips, HOW TO MURDER YOUR WIFE, with Jack Lemmon, they showed that he was this James Bond-type detective. The minute he got married, life changed in the comic strip. I think you need the tension of the characters.

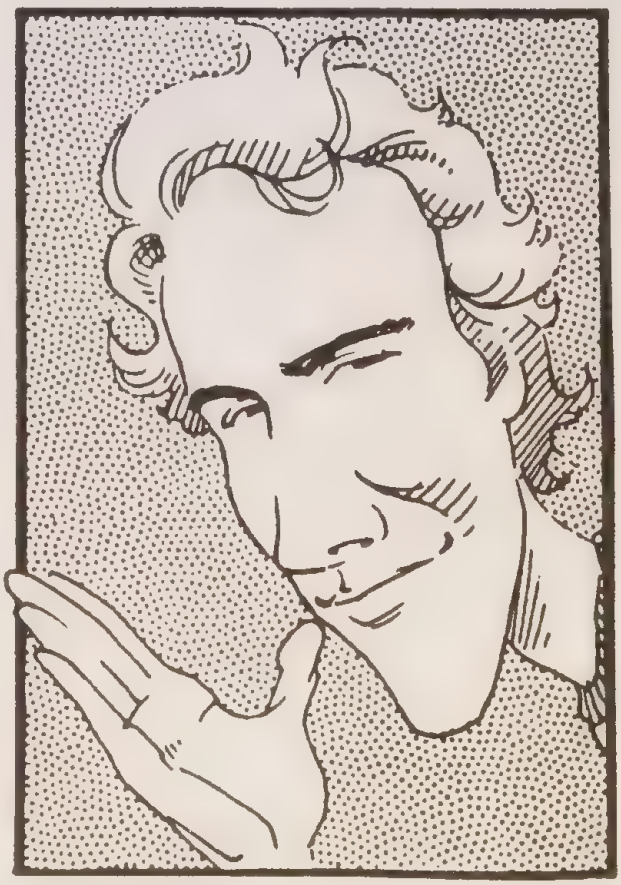
Charles M. Schulz: There's not much room in comic strips for drastic change. All you can do is try to improve a little bit each day, or try some new directions now and then; if you can, then maybe introduce a new character — but not on purpose. I think new characters should come because of some idea that you have had.

John Prentice: In the comic-strip format, you have to be concise. You don't have room for a heck of a lot of dialogue. And the breakdown, you know, with the recap on the front in such a way that the reader is not really aware of it, and the cliff-hanger on the end. You're recapping in the front panel, and yet you don't want to repeat what you did the day before, but still the reader has to be advised because if he missed the day before, he won't know what's going on.

Don Rosa: In most comics nowadays it seems like the idea is to stretch the plot over as many pages or issues as you can in order not to burn your ideas up too fast. But I do my damnedest to cram in as much as I can, and I never have enough room to get as much into the story as I wanted. I get carried away by the story.

Joe Rubinstein: In storytelling, you want the story to flow, and believe it, and if a panel is well composed but the guy can't draw it, then it's not good storytelling because you can't believe this human being can walk.

Steve Rude: The best way to describe *any*



STEVE RUDE self portrait

story is to say it in a sentence. You can tell in a sentence if it's going to work or not.

P. Craig Russell: My storytelling approach remains basically the same, no matter what I do. I go for as clear an interpretation of the writer's viewpoint as I can, while trying to maintain a flow between the pictures.

Tim Sale: In my breakdowns I like to fool with pacing, how quickly or how slowly to tell a story. How many panels does it take, and what size. Words can be used effectively that way, slowing down or speeding up a story.

Ken Selig: The proper editor is looking for a very special quality in the cartoonist. A cartoonist is not just an illustrator. He's both a writer and an artist. It's one of those distinctions that is not made often enough — even if you only do pencilling or inking you've still gotta be a writer, otherwise you don't count as a cartoonist. A cartoonist is a very *special* breed.

Walt Simonson: In western culture we read from left to right, and if there are diagonal panels we tend to read down the diagonal. Placement of word and thought balloons is also important. I also try to do panels where you read across several panels and then when you get to the end of the page the last panel in that row will have visual elements that will act as a stop or brick wall. When you come against it you automatically drop down to the row below. I used to think more about these types of things. Now, I've been doing it so long I really don't have to.

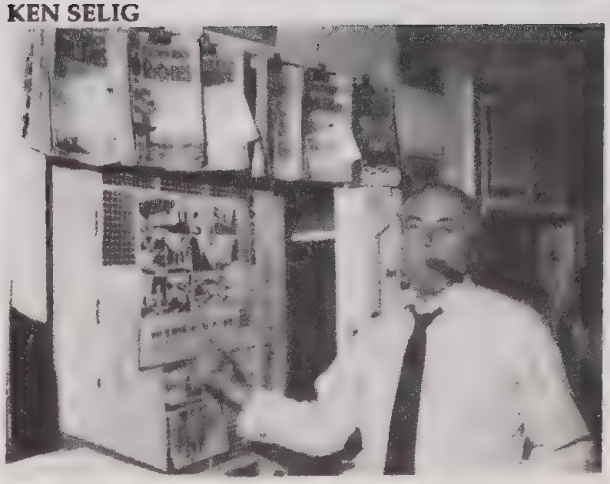
Tod Smith: Every editor has certain pet qualities they are looking for, but they all want clear storytelling and a dramatic approach. Storytelling is the strongest thing you learn at the Kubert School.

Ken Selig: When you do a comic panel I want to see mood in it. I want to see time of day. I want to see illustrative matter highlighted in preference to verbiage.

Marc Swayze: My objective was to try to tell a pictorial story, as independent of the dialogue and captions as possible. This was a rather remote possibility with the romances I later did, but it was a pretty good approach, I thought, with the action-adventure material. One writer, according to editor Wendell Crowley, when he knew his script was going to me, simply wrote "continue action" for most panels, knowing I was going to do it my own way anyhow.

Mike Teitelbaum: I'm a strong believer in

KEN SELIG



letting the pictures tell the story, for the most part. You should almost be able to get the story without reading a single word — then you add the words for depth, enhancement, characterization or scene changes. But if you want to write a novel, write a novel.

Jim Valentino: Second-person narration basically puts the reader in Shadowhawk's shoes. You are Shadowhawk. You are moving through the night. Because we don't really know who the character is, that's the best way to interject a certain emotional level. You are the character. You feel the wind on your face. You feel the bone break under your knuckle. It's the interactive sense of the book, trying to get the reader to interact emotionally with the character, because you can't really interact on an intellectual level, not knowing who he is.

Kevin VanHook: I would recommend not worrying about style but trying to tell stories well. Obviously, you're going to be influenced by the people you like. But, I wouldn't intentionally mimic. In terms of writing, it's the same thing. If you turn in something that's weird for the sake of weird and you're mimicking Alan Moore but you don't know what he's doing underneath, the structure of where he's coming from when he makes a sentence sound a certain way or have a certain rhythm. It's much more important to study the roots of what you're dealing with.

William Van Horn: Animators have always been called "actors with pencils." I think the same thing is true of the best comic-strip and comic-book artists. Being able to act things out is very valuable.

I did some character voices when I was doing animation. And that also helped me when

I was "acting" with a pencil. Some people have said, "We like your work because of the expressions on the characters' faces." Well, all that is acting.

Matt Wagner: To paraphrase Edgar Allan Poe on the short story, which, effectively, a comic book is — every word and every line has to tell the story. I believe in economy. Everything has to be simple and straight to the point.

Telling the Story with Color

Bob Sharen: Sometimes I'll do a yellow sky or something like that, because if you've got a guy who's white or blue up against a blue sky, there's not much contrast. Generally, the only reason I do a pink sky is for a sunrise or sunset or to contrast the character in the panel. The name of the game is contrast and clarity. If you've got a character that's going to have no contrast against a regular sky, then you have to come up with a different color.

Greg Theakston: We color-key whole sequences. That is a problem I find in most comic books, that the colorists will jump from color to color to color in the same sequence. You should clearly see, just from the colors, even if you didn't have the black line artwork there, just from the color combination of the page, you should see where one scene begins and one ends. And there are a lot of colorists in this business who don't know that.

Anthony Tollin: Here at DC there is a strong emphasis on storytelling in the color. If the character goes from one room to another in the story, DC generally wants you to establish that in the colors — you leave one family of colors in one room, blues for example, and go to another family, maybe yellows or oranges, in the next room. In doing that, you can sometimes color yourself into a corner when you discover that the same room may be occupied later in the story by different characters whose costumes may not contrast well with the colors you'd chosen for the rooms earlier. This is a particular danger in group books. I think the most difficult thing, and the most important thing, in coloring — as in other areas of comics — is storytelling.

Telling the Story through Characters

Murphy Anderson: When I developed different character types, I tended to use variations of them in different features. Those two brothers in the Atomic Knights I made identical twins just to help preserve my sanity.

Chris Bachalo: Comics have stereotyped women in horrible ways over the years. All boobs, no brain, able to save the world. With my female characters like Death or Kathy and Lenny in SHADE I try to make them regular people. They don't have big boobs. They don't have big hips. They're more like real women. I think that's why DEATH and SHADE have a strong female following, because one can actually identify with these characters. It works.

Bob Burden: One time I bought a stack of DICK TRACY comics about a foot and a half tall, and he had such great villains. The villains were really the stars of the strip. I started looking into them more and more, and pretty much realized that the villains were more interesting characters than a lot of the heroes they were coming up with.

Alan Moore: The investigation of human evil is something that fascinates me. If my stories are *saying* anything, it's that everybody has the capacity for evil. To pretend it's something that only happens to monsters and super-villains is evading the issue.

Howard Chaykin: The concept of villainy is irrelevant in my life because, frankly, I hate a lot of people that a lot of other people think are just terrific, and vice versa. I think as we get older, those of us who experience some sort of adulthood do recognize the playful silliness of costumed superheroes.

Mike Grell: The villain has to be fully introduced and fully developed and fully characterized in order for you to understand his motivations, his desires, his designs, the quirks and foibles of his character.

Don Rosa: Nazis make such good villains. They're evil, and so good at it! For me, the ultimate villain has *got* to be a Nazi.

John Byrne: At conventions, when kids ask me about The John Byrne Way of Drawing . . . I say there's really nothing more to it than trying to make even the most minor character fully realized. You know, we go and visit our attorney's office and I always say, "Well, who is this guy?" This is a guy who, even if he's only going to appear in three panels, should have a wife and kids and hobbies and stuff . . . I almost always put a bowling trophy in somebody's office. I try to figure what kind of pictures he'll have hanging

on the wall, this kind of stuff, 'cause it's a subliminal thing that feels good, adds greater depth to a character.

Peter B. Gillis: What I try to do is take my characters and stretch them, reveal as much as I can about them, and take those insights, and bring them out. I want the characters to be more fully themselves than they were before.

Bill Chadwick: The early Spider-Man stories that I remember from my youth showed a fallible yet heroic individual struggling to overcome his own weaknesses. That's a struggle that can be as heroic as punching out a super villain. Heroes needn't be gods. But they should exemplify some ideal to which men and women can aspire or emulate.

Here's a tip on thinking through all aspects of a super characteristic, from ***Peter David:*** Have you ever stood in line at the post office behind a woman with 20 packages who wants to know every single way she can send each one to Africa? It drives you nuts! You think, "These people are so slow; they're costing me time." Now — imagine that the *entire world* was like that . . . except you. To Quicksilver, just having a conversation is irritating. I'm not dealing with super speed on a physical level, which is what everyone always seems to focus on. I'm dealing with accelerated speed from the mental aspect; to Quicksilver, the rest of the world is moving in slow motion. That would tend to make you feel very superior to everyone and very impatient with everyone. I find him a really intriguing character from that point of view.

Of course, the point of view of those around him is, "Oh yeah, well [redacted] you."

David DeVries: You get people saying, "Gosh, I wish Southern Cross would be a little less effeminate" and "I wish Smitty would be more sarcastic." I think they really want me to do X-MEN, but the minute I do that, they won't read it. It's the very things they don't like in the character that keep them coming back.

The characters all have their own weaknesses and their bad sides, because superpowered beings are just as likely as normal people to be dickheads. If you suddenly got super powers you wouldn't say, "I'm going to be a hero. Along with my super powers I suddenly developed this moral integrity."

John Dixon: This sounds silly, but for anybody working on a strip for a lot of years, the people become very real to you in your mind. They all have their own personalities, you know. This sounds really wild, it sounds a bit silly, but these people become sort of like friends. Then suddenly you stop production and it's like losing friends.

Steve Englehart: One of the things that turns me on is a feeling that I did a character right. If they all sounded like me, I would have a pretty limited career.

Neil Gaiman: There is a level on which SANDMAN is a device to tell stories.

Peter B. Gillis: Killing somebody off is an extremely arbitrary act, and any writer with sufficient clout at any company can come in and write a story in which a major character dies. People will sit up and take notice because of that very fact. It takes no skill whatsoever; you don't have to know much about characterization. That can generate sensationalism, and it generates reader response. They *will* be startled by it; they will be shocked by it. If that's all you want to do, to shock the readers, if all you want is somebody's attention, then you can get it. But interest is not affection.

Larry Hama: If you're going to have growth for a character, he can't just play one note. You start fleshing the character out and giving him some three-dimensionality and they start telling stories themselves.

Mike Grell: Change is a key factor in writing any good character, and unless your character changes in some way, or learns something or comes to a realization or has something interesting to say about all of this, by the time it's done then it's generally just basically "shoot 'em up, bang, bang."

Larry Hama: You don't get to know a comic-book character or team of characters in one issue. Your knowledge and your appreciation of characters in comics is cumulative. You learn something about the guy in this issue and six months later you pick up something else and it all sort of blends together. It's like getting to know a real person over a long period of time.

If you have a less specific view of the *character* of a character, the character tends to drift in and out of focus. I think the characterization in any of this stuff is extremely important. The actual technical stuff, I don't think is ever as important as putting down very consistent, likable characters. Very few people are going to know whether the material is right, but everyone will automatically sense if a character is right.

Mostly, I think that's what people remember about anything. Like I keep saying to the writers that work for me — you can read PEANUTS for 25 years and you will know all of those Schulz characters backwards and forwards, know how any one of those characters would react in a situation. But it's very difficult for you to sit down and recount one strip from the past 25 years.

Scott McCloud: Wendy Pini based some of her characters on animals. Cutter on a rooster, Leeta on a cat, I believe, and Rayek on a snake. She didn't make it a point that they *had* to act with the characteristics of these animals, it just gave her a core to build on. That sort of characterization, I think, has always been very successful because people who read works where that's done — they sense it. They sense that there's something about this character that really holds him together, something that can't be explained by just the fact that he talks in a certain way or has this power and that power. A character has got to be more than a collection of characteristics.

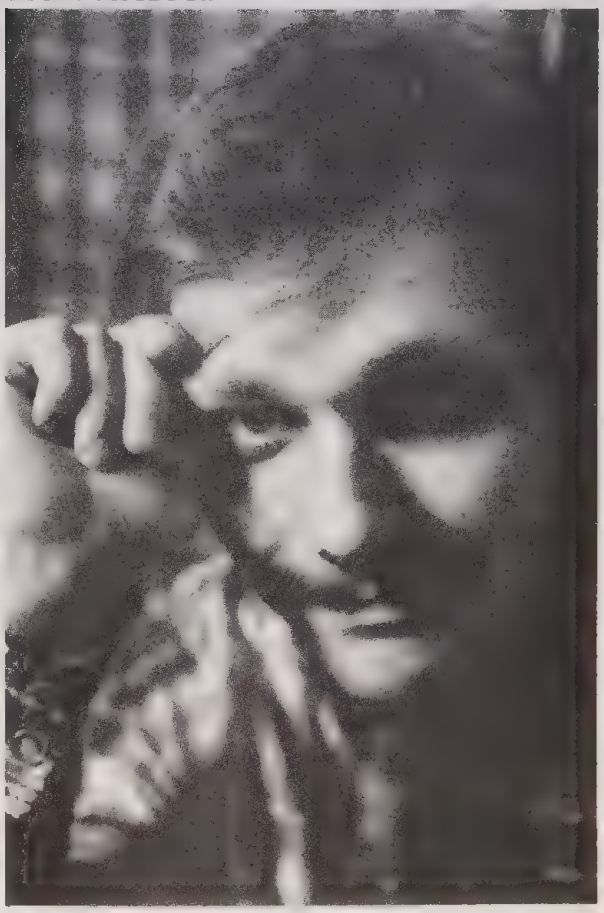
Alex Kotzky: You really don't realize what you're doing until you really sit down and have to *develop* characters. It gets to the point where the characters are telling *you* what to do.

David Anthony Kraft: Like THE INCREDIBLE HULK TV series of several years ago, the emphasis in LOIS & CLARK is on character and story — not battle for the sake of battle, which has become the bane of so many superhero comics. In concept, LOIS & CLARK is closer to the early Marvel Comics approach to, say, Spider-Man than today's rock 'em sock 'em super slugfests — and that's why I like it.

Erik Larsen: Editors forget why they're fans of things. It's also true of a lot of writers. They remember being fans of a given character; and when they get the chance to write that character, their first inclination is to change his costume, his identity, give him a haircut — "What was it you loved about this character? His face? They all have the same face anyway — you could have come up with a new character!" It seems nonsensical to mess with anything that much. To take a character with a homey feel and turn him into an axe murderer — what happened here? You're not treating it with respect.

Jack Kirby: I respected all my characters, I respected the women, I respected the men, and I would give them fair treatment in any kind of convoluted story; and so my stories were good

SCOTT McCLOUD



because people saw reflections of themselves in the stories.

Frank Miller: I can't stand the idea of a hero who snivels and whines and endlessly talks about his feelings! I don't know if it's because writers have been entering psychotherapy, I don't know the exact reason, but it's a failure of craft. The golden rule of writing is that character is *action*, especially in a visual form. There's a bracing, clean feeling when the characters define themselves by what they do rather than what they say.

Alan Moore: I tried to avoid making each of my characters someone who can be summed up in thirty-five words, which is basically the maxim which has been passed down in the comics industry for ten years. I think it was at Marvel that it was actually graven in stone that the *best* characters can be summed up in thirty-five words. I would hate to think that I could be summarized in thirty-five words, and I wouldn't want to go to dinner with anyone who could be.

Charles M. Schulz: I think you establish a

premise in whatever you are doing and you must never destroy that premise. Charlie Brown cannot win to any great extent. I suppose there could be a very brief incident of some kind and you could return to it, but probably the biggest mistake ever made in comic-strip history was Li'l Abner's marriage. The premise of the strip collapsed.

Stan Lee: I think any change you make in a character has disadvantages, and I'm always nervous when these changes are made. But I think it's something you have to do. Because you almost can't have a character, month after month after month, for years, and come up with interesting stories where the character never changes at all.

Denny O'Neil: We're getting hate mail on Knightfall. That's what happens when you play with a 50-year-old legend. It shouldn't stop us from doing it because, if we put these characters in amber, like the mosquitos in JURASSIC PARK, everybody would say, "That's fine, that's nice," but after a while nobody would read them. Superman and Batman have been in continuous publication for 55 and 54 years, respectively. Characters would not survive as popular characters if they did not change. The trick is to allow a character to evolve and yet to preserve the essence of that character, to let the externals change but keep the archetype intact. If we were still publishing the Batman I loved as a kid, I would still love it, but it would have nothing to say to a contemporary audience.

On the other hand, ***Steve Rude*** *offers the following advice to would-be chroniclers of comics' longest-running characters:*

Despite all of the years of development in Superman and Batman, I think the original concepts, the way the creators *originally* did these characters, still has what's most exciting about them. It's hard for me to explain *what* that is. When I look at the original Bob Kane BATMANs, when I look at the original Joker — he's more scary than any other Joker I've seen ever.

Adrienne Roy: There are some books that color themselves — they just shout the color out! BATMAN is one of them. Sometimes you have to feel the character — have a feeling of what the character is going through — in order to understand what colors to use.

I won't try to pin every series down, but for instance every Superman story, by its mood, is a daytime story, and every Batman story — even if it takes place during the day — is a nighttime story. I try for mood as well as contrast.

Charles M. Schulz: Nowadays the characters are created in a cold-blooded fashion by committee, and the comic strips and the action of the characters comes later. Well, usually there *is* no later because the characters die off after a couple of years because they have no life. You can't tell anything that Strawberry Shortcake or any of those characters have ever said. They are cold-blooded creations which have no real life.

Ken Selig: If you can smell body chemistry, not Higgins ink, your character is a live one.

Jim Shooter: Almost all of it grows out of the characters. I mean, everyone here knows what Captain America will say or do in any situation, so you put him in a situation, and he tells you what he's going to say or do. Then that dictates what will happen.

Marc Swayze: From the art standpoint, the romances provided several challenges, such as more emphasis on character development and emotional expression, more realistic art style and more female characters. I enjoyed doing the romances. I drew them easily and fast, and the editors kept me comfortably supplied with scripts.

Peter David: With a group, you generally want a character who will be a sore point, someone who can stir things up.

Roy Thomas: Heroes can have all sorts of flaws but they have to be flaws that make them still seem heroic — and that changes from decade to decade. Something Stan Lee wrote in the '60s that seemed heroic then would now seem jingoistic, because our views on racism and sexism and everything else constantly change. And to keep this in perspective, some of the things that seem fairly enlightened now aren't necessarily going to seem that way in the future.

The Classic Characters of Comics

Steven Grant: The basic theme of comic books is power and the corollary to that is revenge. SUPERMAN is a power fantasy and BATMAN is a revenge fantasy, and those are the two basic elements to superhero comics.

Matt Wagner: I don't tend to agree with this current move on to always show Batman as losing his shit. That doesn't make sense to me.

He's a functioning machine. He's nuts, but by channeling that insanity into the bat costume and into this grand crusade, he manages his sanity. That's how he works and it's why, in DARK KNIGHT, when he finally goes off his nut at the end and kills the Joker, it's so significant.

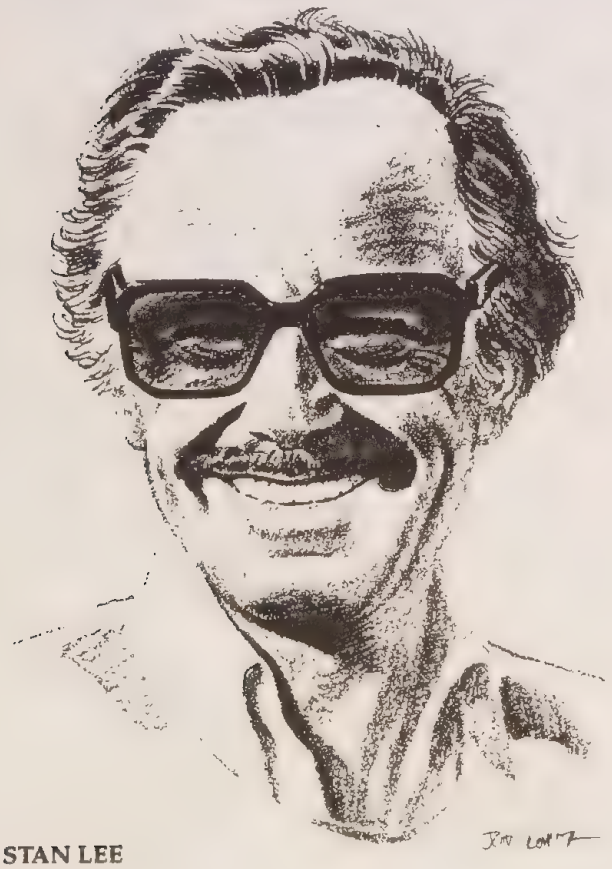
Terry Austin: The one and only time I put Popeye in X-MEN, it was a meeting of all the important people in the galaxy, and it seemed to me that he should be there.

Mark Ellis: During my tenure as editor-in-chief and senior writer of Millennium Publications, I was instrumental in the company acquiring the comic-book rights to Doc Savage. From the outset, I knew I was in for an uphill struggle, inasmuch as the recent DC version was still fresh in the minds of retailers and fans. While toying with an approach, I always kept uppermost in my mind that the primary target audience was composed of Doc Savage fans.

We came up with an approach that delighted not only Doc fans but new readers as well. The approach was not particularly complex: the background of the Doc Savage universe and characters is rich in unexplored details, and I used these details as a springboard. I did not revise, do a "Dark Doc" or say, "This is the way it *really* happened."

I maintained the integrity of the original source material, knowing that my primary target audience were fans of the original source material. I feel that part of the success of BATMAN: THE ANIMATED SERIES is due to the respect (not necessarily reverence) the creators display toward the Batman canon.

In my opinion, this approach should be the norm whenever a character revival is proposed.



STAN LEE

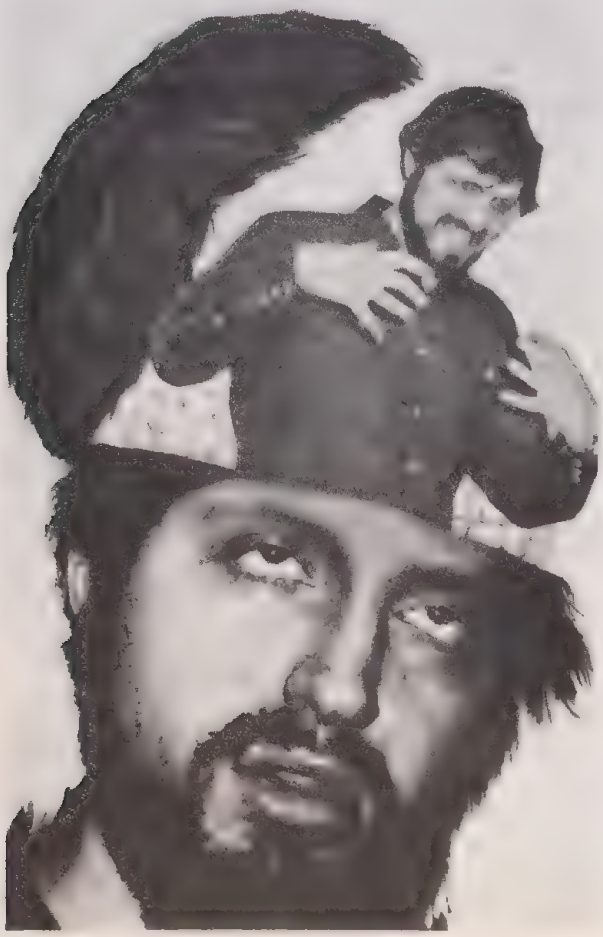
Alan Grant: Judge Dredd does get into heroic situations and does heroic things. He saves kids from fires; he'll endanger himself to save an innocent citizen. But at the same time, in the furtherance of the law, he will stoop to anything. He will, for instance, lie. Batman, I don't think, would ever lie for justice. Batman's first allegiance would be to the truth. The two really are incompatible. It's possible to play Dredd so that he's more compatible with Batman, but when Dredd's played that way, as far as I'm concerned, he becomes like any other hero, like anybody — Batman, Punisher, Spider-Man, Grodd the Gorilla, anybody you care to mention can rescue kids from fires and stop muggings and stuff like that. It's only when Dredd is treating the people he's meant to be protecting as harshly as the people from whom he's protecting them that the essence of Dredd comes into play. A Dredd story's never really complete unless he arrests the victim as well as the perpetrator of the crime.

Kelley Jones: I've always seen Batman as an intimidator. He's going to beat you before he throws a punch. Batman's a guy who could beat the hell out of you, but he's going to use his brain. I've always liked that. He's the guy in a room with you for 15 minutes before you knew it, the kind of guy who knew your plans before you were making them. Batman doesn't have this physical body. He's this shape in a cape with those pointy ears.

I remember this Marshall Rogers issue where he's in this chimney listening. That gave me the creeps. These guys are talking about how they're going to do all this stuff to Batman and he's *in the chimney!* That was great. *That* was Batman.

Stan Lee: One of the beautiful things about secret identities is it gives an additional layer of drama and interest to the situation. That's why, all these years, nobody knew Superman was

MARV WOLFMAN



Clark Kent, nobody knows Spider-Man is Peter Parker and so forth. Because that somehow adds another layer of interest and, I think, even a little more maturity and sophistication to it. The minute you've got a guy running around in a costume and people know who he is — what's the point of the costume?

Frank Miller: What I discovered is that when you're working on a character like Superman — that legend is really what's in control. It won't allow itself to get tossed out. The essential things that make Superman Superman had to be in.

Rich Morrissey: John Byrne seems to be under the impression that a character who is too powerful is impossible to tell stories about, since there's nothing that can challenge him. When you have a hero with almost infinite power, you have to come up with situations where brawn is no good, so he has to use his brains. I think Byrne's one of those people they had a lot of at Marvel Comics — he liked to have a story that's mostly fight scenes, which won't do when you have a hero who can finish most fights within a page.

Marv Wolfman: I like Superman because . . . I think it's the same reason I like Thor. These are primary characters. You can do any type of story with Superman. Other writers see it as just the problem of having to use his powers. I say, hey! There are all these powers — it's just that nobody ever really exploited them. They had him fly, punch a tank, stop a whirlwind, but they never *really* used his powers, not to the dynamic possibilities that Superman can be used.

Alvin Schwartz: Superman and Batman both were always too unyieldingly good, and goodness and humor don't go together. The best way around that was fantasy. I used it, and certainly Jerry Siegel used it.

I wouldn't have felt comfortable having Superman, Batman and Robin together. They represented such antithetical unities. That putting them together in WORLD'S FINEST COMICS was a solution of a difficult editorial problem doesn't change the immiscibility of the characters.

Roger Stern: Batman does what he does because his parents were killed in front of his eyes. And Spider-Man feels guilty. Why does Superman do what he does? Because that's the way his parents brought him up. It's because Ma and Pa said that's the way to live your life. He loves and respects his parents. It's a real middle-American origin. He does it because he was brought up right.

People who don't understand Superman say that he's naive, he's a boy scout, he's a do-gooder. He's been around. He's seen corruption. He knows it. He's a reporter for a major newspaper in a major urban area. He's seen plenty of corruption. He's seen it all. He can't hide from it. So, he doesn't really have a lot of misconceptions about the world he lives in. But, he's trying to make it better. I think that's the key to what makes him so appealing. He keeps trying to make things work right. Batman comes at it from the opposite direction. Batman's trying to make the world sane because he is insane. I think everyone's a little crazy. But, Superman's a little more optimistic. Batman is driven; Superman is an optimist. He's not a cock-eyed optimist; in fact, his vision is very good.

Telling the Story Through Design

Neal Adams: I always try to find something in whatever it is that I do that challenges different levels of thinking beyond just storytelling: design, flow, speed of reading a story, slowness of reading a story, changing the speed at which someone reads the story by changing the design of the story.

One of the things I discovered was that most comic-book artists were stuck in a 1950s style of doing comic books. It was in the mid-'50s, I guess, that it was decided that it was no longer necessary to draw a page twice the size that it was going to be reproduced. It was decided to draw the page 150 percent the size that it was going to be reproduced. But all of these artists had been used to drawing the page 200 percent.

Well, at that size your field of vision is not so broad that it encompasses the whole page, in fact even at 150 percent it's not that broad. It's not until it's reduced to its comic-book size that your field of vision can really concentrate and take in the whole page. So what I decided to do was to design my pages as though they were one composition, and use the composition of the page to help me tell a story besides the individual panels. So, by designing the page you could take the focus of the reader's eye and move it however you wanted to do it; through design, simple design, nothing complicated or sophisticated.

Brian Bolland: I've never been very interested in the actual layout of the page, or the technique, composition and balance of the page. I've always been interested in the individual panel and what's in it, and actually having to fit them all on a page is a bit of a problem. In the past I've bogged down in trying to do flashy page layouts, when it's an area that I'm not interested in — I'd rather stick with regular-sized rectangular boxes and get the story told as well as possible within the boxes. So I'm more interested in the narrative than composition and design at all times.

Max Allan Collins: The conventions of the medium are there for a reason. There has been, I think, too much attention paid to the shape of panels, and maybe not enough to what is going into them. You know when you go to a Hitchcock movie, the shape of the screen doesn't constantly change. It is distracting. We really don't want anything to get in the way of the story. People come to MS. TREE to read the story, not to see the pretty pictures.

This takes nothing away from Terry Beatty's art. I think it says volumes favorably about Terry's work, because the work is in service of the story. He is as much of a storyteller as I am. It is not my business to write it and his to illustrate it. He is not simply the grace notes; he is the real stuff. He tells that story. Some of the best panels I've written are silent ones. And I think that is true of most writers. I think if you ask most of the writers in this business, they really take pride in pages that are minimal.

Dave Gibbons: The more I progress, the less I worry about what marks I make, and the more I worry about the composition, and the drama that's inherent in the way you set up a scene. I get more and more concerned about the big shapes, and less and less concerned about the tiny lines.

Keith Giffen: It's hard to do a team book. You can do fancy breakdowns with Dr. Fate, Dr. Strange or even Superman. It's only one character fighting another character. When you have to keep track of a whole group, it's best to stick with a standard comic-book format and let the story carry the book.

Rick Hoberg: Sometimes I use storyboard on which all the panels are the same size like a television screen — and I will story it out so that I know basically what the elements are, which ones can be featured better than the others. And then I'll do the comic page. But the design of the page, and where the actual elements that I've already established will be, all happens as the page is coming out of me. I kind of let composition flow out of me that way.

You've got to be able to move the reader's eye around the page. You've got to make simple designs. Mostly, I use letters — which is a real old trick. I take something out of the alphabet — a "Z" or an "A" or anything like that — and I just make the page flow like that. It is a great old trick. And it always works. All the guys that I know of do that. One time I overheard Neal Adams at a San Diego Con talking to Joe Orlando about a page that somebody had been working on. One of them kind of ran his hand over it in a "Z" shape and you knew that he was talking about the graphic design.

Val Mayerik: I like pretty much to draw the kind of comic that I like to read. And I pretty

much always have liked to look at one panel and see a little world in there, a little story taking place in each panel. Seeing the whole page as one graphic design is important, to a degree, but I think for me, it gets in the way of telling the story. I try to have the most direct and simplest storytelling techniques that I can.

George Pérez: I think if I start breaking it down and succeed then I'll be looking at my own mechanicalism, and I really don't want to do that. There should be a certain sense of spontaneity in design. Many a time if I design a page, as I'm drawing it, the page changes little by little because I don't want to stick to the total forced code that I've placed upon myself. So I start altering things here or there.

Steve Rude: Kirby paints as well as draws and he is a genius at it. I'm also analyzing the way in which he paints. He takes blocks of graphic shapes and puts colors on them and that composes his work. Like everything else, he defies any kind of logical manner of color toning in his work and makes it work.

Paul Becton: One of the most difficult things to color in comics is real people and real backgrounds. Not only does everybody have to be different, but you have to be sure the furniture is something they can all be seen against; and the walls, something everything can be seen against. Then there's all the bric-a-brac in the room — the ashtrays, the lamps, garbage cans, pictures on the wall. That takes more time than anything.

Walt Simonson: You can view the page as an architectural drawing where not only are you working left to right but from top to bottom. The bottom of the page is the bottom that the whole design rests on.

Jim Starlin: I try to work a lot of design stuff in whenever I can — but once I get going, I'll sacrifice the design of the page to tell the story right.

Don Rosa: I've read articles and interviews with Dave Sim or Mike Gilbert or whoever, and they carry on page after page in a very scholarly manner about the way they lay out a page or work out complex psychological patterns for characters and so forth. I'm not at all ashamed to say just the opposite. Good or bad, right or wrong, I never think about what I'm drawing. I don't worry about the effect of the page as a whole, or how the dramatic lighting or use of black areas would affect the reader. Of course, in an individual panel, I'll consider what would be the most effective angle, but basically I just wanna tell an entertaining story. The genius of Barks was that without even being aware of it, he was producing the most complex, authentic characters in the most entertaining stories, with the most perfect blend of comic-book art, writing, plotting, characterization, comedy and adventure in the history of the medium. Not like today, where every page of art and every line of dialogue is so painfully self-conscious of its purpose in making its creator another living legend and convention guest. Barks did it the best because he was simply trying to please himself.

Telling the Story in Different Genres

J.M. DeMatteis: The rules of good writing apply no matter what the genre.

Steve Bissette: Genre is important because it's a shorthand language. If you go to see a movie and right away you see this guy on a horse with a guy, immediately reams of information from countless other westerns click into place. Horror's the same way, like any genre. The genre is a vessel, a vehicle, with its own shape and form and language. Communicating on so many possible conscious and unconscious levels — fascinating, potent tool.

Contrast the above with the following remark by the immortal ***Jack Kirby:*** Speaking for myself, the subject matter doesn't matter to me. It can be any kind of a subject. The idea is to get a story out of it. That's what I've been managing to do all these years, is getting a story out of whatever kind of angle I could dig up — communicating with the people who are reading that story. I don't want to be some hifalutin' intellectual. I like to inject the kind of thought the average guy has. I like to communicate with the average guy. And I like to give him the kind of story that is believable. He's my target, the average guy.

J.M. DeMatteis: I must have done 200 vampire stories and werewolf stories. I discovered that when you play with them the right way they can be a lot more interesting than the superhero stuff. I always found with that kind of dark fantasy you can play with things psychologically. You're getting into archetypes. Primal myths. You can go in a million different directions.

Will Eisner: Most of my work, in recent years, has been centered on what I like to call the selection of memory. And the reason for that is, I like to regard myself as an honest writer. I like to write about what I know. And what I know about is what I've experienced. I find it very hard to write about mutants in space. Well, there are very good men writing about that, and they are skilled and have a brilliant talent in that area, but I don't feel comfortable writing in that particular genre — because I don't know it.

Moebius: When I draw BLUEBERRY, I'm consciously and very rigidly following a set of graphic rules that are particular to the Western, but the result is still mine. You wouldn't say that it looks like anyone else. It's the same with superhero comics. I could have tried to follow the rules within my own style, but that would have required more time and more energy than I wanted to spend.

The Genre — Superheroes

Clive Barker: Try to find something you haven't seen before, at least in the form you're presenting it. I think that's part of the challenge. Your responsibility is to not simply recycle old heroes with new names but to try to find something a little fresh. I think the current crop of new heroes resemble the old heroes. They just have bigger muscles, bigger guns, and new names. I find that kind of boring.

Mark Borax: Every time I turn around, scores of superheroes get slaughtered wholesale, and new ones pop up like mushrooms to take their place — but all the super powers in Creation don't amount to a hill of beans unless you've got a human being with a *soul* inside.

Chester Brown: For comics to progress as an art form we have to forget superheroes. It's a dead-end genre. We have to start drawing comics that will appeal to adults, and the only adults who enjoy superhero comics are adults with stunted intellects and adolescent tastes.

Howard Chaykin: The publishers all say they want something different, but they keep buying superheroes.

J.M. DeMatteis: That Stan Lee and Jack Kirby FANTASTIC FOUR and THOR is still really, really good stuff. That's one of the reasons I think superheroes are a dead end; because no matter what we do, they did it then and they did it better. I really think that if the stuff's gonna be better you've gotta step outside of that universe

MOEBIUS self portrait

— outside of that whole mindset — and start doing some new things.

Mike Friedrich: If you don't like the news go out and make some of your own — the opportunity is there at *all* of the publishers to create original material that interests you. So create it!

Marc Silvestri: The market's not really restricted. There's all sorts of publishers out there publishing all sorts of different stuff. It depends, really, upon how much money you want to make. You're not going to make a lot of money on independent comics.

Michael Gilbert: It's absurd to say that there's anything that has no place in comics. You can have any number of subject matters on TV, in movies, and in books, and you can certainly have just as great a variety of subject matter and approaches in comics. There's absolutely no reason in the world to say that "this" can't be done.

Frank Miller: One cannot moan and groan about the marketplace being limited when all

we're producing is one kind of comic. I love superheroes, but more and more I'm finding myself trying to explore the different things that comics can do in other genres.

Alan Moore: One of the big problems with comics is they're geared towards the superhero style, and the superhero is geared towards hyperbole. You start off with the greatest superhero of all time, so he has to fight the greatest villain of all time. For the next issue you need an even greater villain, and so on, until you have a villain who eats planets. And when you're using that character every few months, it becomes *commonplace* for people to eat planets. The more stepped-up it is cosmically, the less effective it becomes.

Denny O'Neil: Most of the superheroes are out of a tradition of heroic fiction in our literature that goes back to Gilgamesh. That tradition has limits. But I think there is a tremendous amount of elbow room and certainly a large amount of unexplored possibilities in that tradition. The limits are a lot further out than anyone knows, and we haven't come close to reaching them yet.

Charles Vess: I enjoy subtlety a lot, and it's not very often that you can get that into a superhero story. It's more often that the problem is solved with a fist rather than with the character's wits. So I haven't done very many super-hero stories and probably won't.

Mike Vosburg: If you want to make money you've got to do superheroes; you've got to work on the mainstream books — or you've basically got to come up with a new commercial idea that's going to be *very* successful.

Fitting It Together: Continuity and the Superhero Universe

Clive Barker: One of the great things about an imaginative world is that you can make just about anything fit. I'm still amazed, in a way, that the island of Maui and Des Moines belong in the same world. The fact is, the world around us is incredibly diverse. Why not the same diversity or more in an imaginative world?

John Byrne: I've been experiencing a growing frustration in the last four or five years — it's probably fbout ofur or five years that I've been moaning and groaning to people about this thing— that there are now, because of the structure of the Marvel and DC Universes, so many stories we simply cannot do. We cannot do the first alien contact story, for example, as a real simple, basic comic-book story. It's not only been done — it's been done 27 times. You can't do the first time-travel story; you can't do magic other than how magic has been established in those universes.

On the other hand, ***John Byrne*** *also gives us the following tip:*

I think creativity functions better under limited freedom, because you're forced to be creative. You are forced to come up with ways to do the things you want to do within the structure, within the rules.

Erik Larsen: Continuity can get to be a noose. When Spider-Man has fought a particular villain forty times or so, if you keep referring to those old stories again and again, it lessens the villain and the conflict. A villain who says, "Spider-Man — you've beaten me 40 times before. This time I'll get you!" That doesn't seem likely. If the writer ignores the previous encounters, or glosses over it, it can be exciting to the reader. He doesn't have to be notified that this character has fought the hero millions and millions of times.

Marty Pasko: If I try to start reading an issue when I haven't read the previous four issues, I don't know what the hell is going on. It's not written in such a way as to make it accessible. The art — and it really is an art — of graceful exposition, done so deftly that you aren't aware that things are being explained to you, is virtually absent.

Dan Slott: MIGHTY MOUSE alienated the non-comic-book-fan reader by making every issue tied to Marvel or DC continuity. Things like Saymore, the Subplotter; or Mices on Infinite Earth. They were funny issues, but if you didn't read comics you were left in the dark. I didn't want to take REN & STIMPY in that direction. Heading in that direction would have alienated the REN & STIMPY fans.

Peter B. Gillis: The writers who excited me, who kept me interested in comics, were trying to push it a little further, trying to say, "Okay, how do I reinterpret it for myself? How do I take all the stuff I loved as a kid and also make it work for me as an adult?" That almost never meant violating the old stuff, because of their love of the old stuff, but instead working towards fleshing it out.

III. The Business of Comics

Publishing — Self and Otherwise

Mike Friedrich: We've counselled creators on what steps you need to do to become a publisher. Most decide they don't want to.

Bill Black: When you start your own business, your business is your *life*, and every penny you make from that business is poured back into the business. Most small businesses take several years to get into the profit area.

Jon Davidge: Comics publishing, as anyone working in the business knows, is a very expensive business. The editorial cost of one of our weekly publications, 32 pages plus a cover, is substantially more expensive than extremely glossy magazines that I was working on before because we pay a substantially fair amount of money for the new artwork and for writers and . . . in addition to that the separation costs are very high. It is an expensive business.

Chuck Dixon: Going over to the publishing side has been an education. It's helped me a lot in my freelance career, especially knowing the distribution end, why distributors buy comics, why retailers order so many of this. What's saleable, what's commercial, what are they looking for, the realities of the business. What you've got to do to call attention to something that may not be commercial. Because I've done everything but be an actual editor, it's allowed me to see everything from either side.

Mike Friedrich: There tends to be a sense on the part of creators to *personalize* the relationships they have with publishers. For Steve Gerber it was very *personal* that he was in this legal conflict with Marvel. To Marvel it was all business — and once that business was taken care of, there was no obstacle to *more* business.

Steve Gerber: Part of the attraction of publishing is having some kind of real control — not just over the copyrights and over the ownership of the material — which can be had elsewhere — but also over the quality of it.

Lance Jacobs: Independent publishers are generally at the mercy of their printer and other suppliers, not vice versa. Our hollow threats to take business elsewhere are met with a shrug, a yawn or a chuckle, as the volume of books we individually print merits no greater response. That's how you know you're an independent.

Joe Matt: Self-publishing is a compromise. If you get a publisher, then you don't have to spend any time on the phone with these distributors or printers or any of that shit. You just have to talk to your publisher every now and then.

If you have a publisher you're happy with and you trust, keep doing your work and own your own copyright above all.

Jim Salicrup: Topps operates very lean. I've always been a fan of lean, small operations, no fat basically. COMICS INTERVIEW, I think, is a good example of a lean operation.

David Mazzucchelli: Self-publishing: If it works, you take the responsibility. If it doesn't work there's no one to blame, no one to point your finger at. It stands or falls on its own merit.

Creators' Rights

The issue of creators' rights is not as new as many of us think. Our opening anecdote, related by ***Sheldon Moldoff****, took place nearly half a century ago — but the last sentence is good advice any time, any place.*

I did the first horror book . . . I forget what year it was. I brought it down to Bill Gaines. He was going to close up shop but decided to stay and see if he could come up with a hit magazine. I said, "I'll give you an idea if you give me a percentage." And he said, "I sure will!" So we worked up a contract, and I brought him in the first horror magazine, TALES OF THE SUPERNATURAL.

He took it and put it in the drawer. Close to a year later, he came out with his own horror titles. I was furious! I said, "Bill, we had an agreement!" He said, "Well, I decided I can't pay percentages, and there's not a thing you can do about it. It's a worthless contract."

I said, "What do you mean, *worthless?* Dave drew it up." Dave was the lawyer working for the firm. So I went to see Dave. He said, "Shelly, you're young, pass it off to experience. There's nothing you can do about it, and if you try we'll blackball you in the business."

I took it to another lawyer, and he said, "Next time, get your *own* lawyer to draw up the contract."

Neal Adams: The reason I dropped out of comics, out of working for DC and Marvel, was because I didn't like the work-for-hire contract — and I still don't like it. I don't write work-made-for-hire contracts unless somebody actually asks me to.

Every time an artist presented a piece of work to DC or Marvel, DC or Marvel would take all rights or else they wouldn't print it. Well, it was the way the business was run and you can't fault a lion for being a lion. They don't know any better, that's what they do. But in the book field — I mean, people take rights all of the time, you can't make a deal with somebody without them taking rights — but the idea is to leave a little behind so if there's a potential then you share in the potential.

Steve Leialoha: I have nothing against doing work-for-hire, as long as I have the option of doing stuff that is not work-for-hire. It's not having that choice that I don't like.

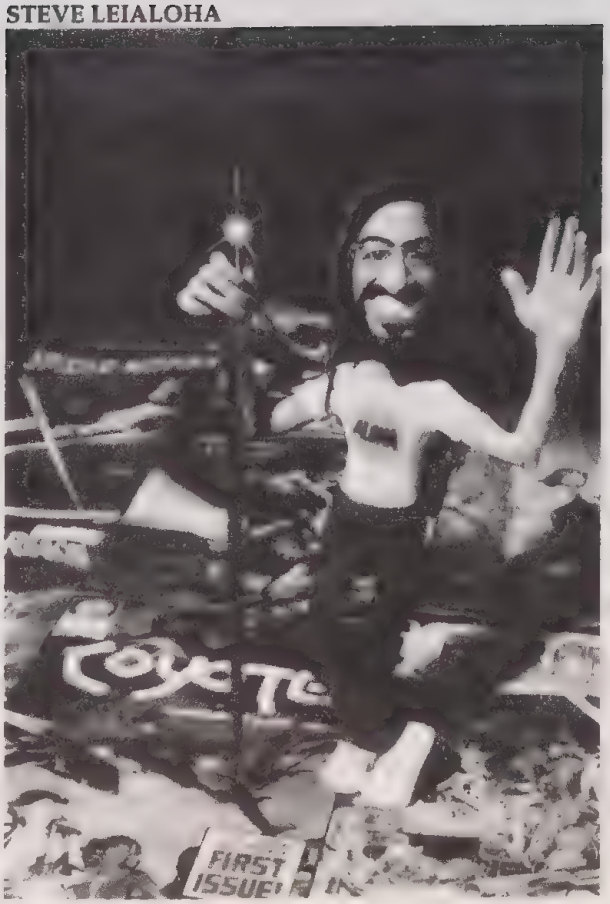
Chris Warner: My feeling is if you want to do work for Marvel and DC fine, but admit that you are a hired hand doing a job to make a buck. That's cool, I'm certainly not above that myself. Sometime in the future I might need to have my teeth fixed or something and be willing to do a Dark Spidey or something.

Dan Barry: Charlie Biro once called me in, during those depression years when nobody could get work. Charlie offered me work if I would work at a reduced rate — the going rate was $35 then, so he offered me $25 with the promise that "when we make it big, you're going to cash in." What a crock. The moment he made it big, where he was paying $100 a page, he called in all of the big names. I got two pages at the back of the book. So much for promises.

Jim Mooney: I worked for a guy who marketed toys and he was milking me for ideas. I'd come up with stuff and he'd pay a certain amount and, "Well, if we develop them we'll *both* get rich!" Well, I think he got rich but I never did.

Steve Bissette: After giving three years of my life to a character that belongs to DC Comics, and doing well by that, I'm interested in reaping some of the personal benefits that I can enjoy from my stint, rather than just feeding a character that belongs to this amorphous entity known as The Company. I'd rather channel all that energy into some of my own creations, and hopefully come out of it with something that's a bit more personally satisfying. I feel that we gave our all

STEVE LEIALOHA



to SWAMP THING, and after the torch was passed on, there was the hindsight to see that even though you gave your all, what you gave doesn't belong to you.

Chris Claremont: The low point in my career on X-MEN is leaving the X-Men. You don't invest seventeen years of your life in a project and then walk away with a smile on your face and a tap dance on your feet.

Frank Miller: Marvel's philosophy, that they're testing out to the fullest, is that the artists are interchangeable and that the ideas are best kept as company property. But when you have created something, been associated with it, been the only writer to touch the character, and something happens like their bringing back Elektra without even consulting me, you don't really feel safe with the character anymore.

I'm glad I caught on as early as I did. Elektra is one of the few characters I've created that I don't own.

Mark Evanier: Too much time is spent explaining inconsistencies of comics twenty years ago that no one cares about anymore.

And there's a great disrespect for what's gone before. You have both these things going on. I have a strange theory to which most people in the field don't subscribe: The person who starts a comic book always has a certain proprietary interest in it, which other writers and artists should respect, even if the company doesn't.

Gene Colan: Contracts have some good points and they have some poor points. I think that artists today have a little more to say about their lives, and are in a better position to direct their lives, when they are free of contracts.

I think contracts keep them limited. Although, I must say that Marvel is one of the best companies, as far as comic-book companies go, to be involved with a contract. It does eliminate an awful lot of legwork and worry and wondering where the next assignment is coming from.

Neal Adams: One of the things that I would advise people on a regular basis it that if you get a contract and you know you're going to sign it, don't sign it on the day you get it. I'm not telling you that you've got to give it to a lawyer — you should always go to a lawyer if you can, if it's important enough — but just let a day go by, take a beat and think about it a little bit. You don't have the guy hand it to you and you sign it in front of him; take it and go away, let a beat go by.

Mike Friedrich: All publishers have different sets of rights that they want to have, or insist on having. You as the creator have to decide how much to give them. A larger publisher will tend to put a lot more money guaranteed in your pocket for something you've come up with, but in trade they're going to want to control a lot of the back end possibilities. A smaller company may not be able to offer you as much up front, but you're going to wind up with a larger chunk later on.

Neal Adams: We're in a business. If the publishers are in business with us then it's logical that they present their point of view that's different from our point of view, and that we try to find some kind of meeting between them. What you want is your publisher to get rich. If they get rich that means you get rich — you don't want the publisher to get rich by themselves; you want to get rich together.

If they're not going to make money then there's no way they're going to let you make money, but if you can make money together you can have a good relationship. We should be in association with our publishers. We should understand where they are coming from. But for such a long time it just seemed like the publisher had the only gun in town. Now things have changed.

Ernie Colón: One of the problems artists have is that they want to do the work desperately. And the business is run by people who don't have the slightest fuckin' notion of what makes an artist tick — all they know is that they see in front of them a sap who will do anything to work. So, of course, they rape and pillage the poor son of a bitch for years.

Gerry Conway: In fields such as comics or movies, where the people who are the practitioners are doing it for a childhood love of the medium, we tend to think that people are going to take care of us like children, and our relationships are going to be family kind of relationships. That's just not true. In every case — comics, movies, whatever — it's a business, and when business needs change, every other relationship changes. It just makes it more painful if you think you had a personal relationship with someone, who then turns around and stabs you in the back. But if you acknowledge that this person is going to stab you in the back, and you keep that in mind all the way through, then you're ready and in a position of defense when it happens.

Mark Evanier: You find in every corporation, people who will embrace the corporation like it is Daddy. This applies to every company that has ever existed, without exception. You have people who cling to the company and do everything they can for the company, thinking the company will take care of them. They basically allow the company to own them, figuring the firm will be good to its own property. You can always spot these people because they're the ones who, in the end, really get reamed. They get it the worst, because they lose all dependence on themselves as individuals.

Frank Frazetta: Ace kept my original art, and that was pretty standard, one of the reasons being that most artists didn't care. I mean, they painted it, and got paid and forgot about it. And that is primarily the reason I think some of that art is inferior; because I saw no reason to work much harder than was necessary. The work I did later, like for Lancer, is really no better than I was capable of in the '60s. I have to feel that the effort is worth something. If the art is awfully good, I simply can't see it just being shipped around and

lost and put into some stockroom or something.

Mike Friedrich: There's a tremendous number of creative people who don't really realize the true value of their work in the marketplace, what kind of position they *could* have if they wanted it, in the form of more interesting strips to work on, in the form of better people to work with, in the form of the kind of money they're getting.

Steve Gerber: What does an author really have? All he really owns are his copyrights.

Bob Kane: I don't feel that any publisher should own a copyright, I really don't. I think it's unfair. It should be 50-50. The creator should maintain 50% of the copyright.

Alan Grant: Much as I enjoy working, which I do — I've spent quite a lot of my time doing it — one of the few feelings which rivals it is the feeling that you get when you get a royalty check. Something that you get for something that you've already been paid for. It's great to have people give you money for nothing, so to speak.

Bob Burden: These publishers wanted to give me ten grand for the reprint rights to the first ten CARROTs. I told them I wanted it delivered in a briefcase in small bills and I haven't heard from them since.

Ed Hannigan: I have an exclusive contract with DC, which isn't a bad deal. I get medical benefits and get invited to the Christmas party. It's nice to be able to not be under contract so that you can run over to another company to do work but that's for young people. That's for people who don't have to worry about their family and medical disasters.

Jack Kirby: I think a good artist can work with a good publisher on a good business basis, but each one of them must be protected in some way. Each of them. The publisher has rights, and the artist has rights, and these rights have to be established. In the old days the rights were nebulous. The artist never knew where his rights began. Well, there was a nebulous line which we couldn't define and, of course, the job had to be done and everybody did the job, and somehow the business end of it never came under discussion.

Rob Liefeld: Work for hire is not a bad thing when you're happy with the deal. I do trading cards on a work-for-hire basis. It is bad when you don't get a good deal because the editor tells you "It's the going rate" or else "You haven't paid your dues." Every one has a sense of worth about themselves and we try to meet that.

Steve Leialoha: I never wanted to write for Marvel — or any other publisher — unless I could own what I was writing. I didn't want to come up with ideas that are commercially viable and not be able to get a percentage of it.

Rob Liefeld: I've always wanted to create my own characters and I couldn't see myself working for Marvel the rest of my life, given the way the company was structured. I basically sat down and put on paper the minimum amount of sales I would need to make a living, to keep the clothes on my back and a roof over my head.

Todd McFarlane: We each have our own game plan, but part of the game plan was creating the next Superman, Batman, Mickey Mouse. But we'd own it! If I create the next Mickey Mouse I'm going to profit.

Frank Miller: I've been asked a number of times at conventions and such why people don't stay on books. It's a real concern to readers, because they like a particular person's work on a title, and then the person leaves after a year. Then they have to completely readjust. My answer has been that if it's one of the company-owned books, and you're investing that much of yourself in it, after a while you start to feel like a real jerk because you know you can be replaced. You know you have no long-term investment in it. All you have to do is look at everybody from Jack Kirby to Chris Claremont and you can see that there is no loyalty coming from the other side.

Mike Friedrich: Within the Marvel and DC structure — this is not true at other publishers necessarily — the publisher is the ultimate arbiter as to what a creator is going to do with the material. By contract the publisher can decide that the creator can be replaced, or their work changed, and that creates an environment where the publisher is always dominant over the creator, rather than a partner. No matter how *positive* the day-to-day relationship is, the dominance is inherent in the structure.

Alan Moore: If DC and Marvel Comics now have pretensions regarding this adult market, they should adopt adult business practices. Instead, they continue to treat their creators as chattel.

Jim Valentino: I think that better working conditions and more equitable pay, and hopefully, creative people being treated better, like human beings as opposed to cattle, is a far better way to go about things.

Dan Barry: One of the reasons I never stayed on any big comic-book feature was that I just never trusted having my faith in any one publisher.

Bernie Mireault: When I worked for DC, I felt like I was contributing to pop culture in general. I did realize, though, that working on anything other than your own stuff is kind of silly. You've got to make compromises, though. Working only on your own stuff, sometimes it's impossible to eke out a living.

Doug Moench: I wanted to concentrate on my own stuff when I left Marvel. This is all well and fine, but even under the best of conditions it takes time to get new projects rolling, while the mortgage is still due every month, not to mention the phone, heating and electric bills.

Alan Moore: My ambition is to write graphic novels for book companies, which will be going out to the book shops, with me owning the rights to my own creations, the company having the right to print the material once. This is a bit more reasonable and civilized.

The following tip, from ***Jan Mullaney****, reminds us that great responsibility comes from great power — uh, from creator's rights, that is.*

It's one thing to work for a company and to be told what to do, because when you don't own the character you take a different attitude. Now that the artists and writers own the copyright, there is a greater responsibility at their end. So they're taking more care and more time to produce the books. The publisher always takes the rap for not being on schedule, because obviously it's the publisher's job to get the books out on time. But when creative people give you their word and sign contracts that say they're going to do things by a certain day — then don't — there's only so much you can do.

George Pérez: If nothing else, the JLA/AVENGERS thing has taught me a very bitter lesson: Never to do anything unless I get everything in front of me in writing.

Paul Power: As a creative individual, deal through an agent. Protect yourself. I am not accusing the companies, all I am saying is use common sense, use business sense. I can't stress enough that comic books are a business and you're dealing with businessmen. Even if they love comics, you're dealing with businessmen, so make sure that you're covered, get your Library of Congress copyright, do your registration — just cover yourself.

ALAN MOORE

Dave Sim: I've always been a big advocate of at least trying self-publishing. If it's not for you, you'll know pretty quickly that it's not for you, that you're a guy who, for good or ill, should be working for other people or should have somebody handling the business side.

Chris Warner: I don't think there's any reason trying to fight for a lot of creative freedom when creative freedom is already available someplace else. It's not available for as much money, but the thing is — in comics, in film, in anything else — if you want to do the kind of work that you want to do and do more artistic work, you're probably not going to make as much money doing it.

Jim Valentino: You get into it for the love of comics. But comics *is* a business and you have to approach it — if you're going to be a professional, if this is how you're going to put food on your table — you have to approach it as a business. And that means you have to approach it with a lawyer. Before you bend over to sign that contract, you make sure your pants are firmly cinched.

Martin Wagner: When you've spent your

entire career doing work for hire, like everyone who works for the Big Two, creative freedom is totally moot. When you're doing stories about characters that DC owns, DC has every goddamn right in the world to tell you what to do. They can call the shots and you know that when you sign that contract; everything trademarked and copyrighted by a corporation is *owned* by that corporation. You really start to sound like a little spoiled kid when you get up on your soapbox and start bitching and whining about how mean they are to you 'cause they made you cut this panel out of your book where the Joker was dressed up like Madonna. Hey, you sign that contract, you sign that creative freedom away.

Roy Thomas: If a company wanted to make a policy that everybody's masks had to be worn upside-down, I guess they have the right to do it, if they own the characters. I can disagree with it, if I can talk them out of it then fine, and if not then I have to go along with it if I'm to continue writing the book.

Chris Warner: Once you've proven that you've got a fan base and you can exist without having to do those things, if you really do have a commitment to creative freedom and doing superior work then that's what you should do, and find a way to do it as quickly as possible rather than trying to push these monolithic companies that are not going to give up ground easily. Those companies tend to make changes when the pressure's coming from an outside force, like Marvel and DC started paying royalty and incentive payments because Pacific was doing it.

Bill Willingham: The independents are good, especially in the rights they let you retain. The rights to your own stuff. One of the problems I've had with the independents that I've worked for is that as great as it is that they're not like the two big companies, because the creator gets to own everything — the balancing factor is a boatload of inexperience in publishing. To the point where publishers have had the attitude that, "My word, do we really need to pay these people to publish their stuff? We know we need to pay the printers, the separators, the production men, and we need to pay for ads and stuff — but why do we need to pay these people, since we're publishing their stuff? Aren't they happy to have their stuff published?" I'm not including all of the independents. But this has been a very common experience.

Cat Yronwode: The royalty programs are now sufficient to intrigue certain people who would have left comics otherwise, but the idea of owning your own copyright is still a step beyond, and some creators still don't even know that's possible! I have to hammer it home to them: "You have a long life ahead of you. Don't sell your soul or the products thereof for instant gain right now. Think of yourself as a career cartoonist." You know, it's hard to talk to people about that, because a lot of them also still have that childish desire: "Boy, when I grow up, I'm going to draw Superman." Sure, that's fine, that's good, but remember — you'll never *own* Superman.

*I think the following admonition, shared with us by **Tod Smith**, makes an appropriate closing for this section:*

I asked Jack Kirby, "What would be the best advice you could give someone coming into the comic-book field?" And he said, "Hang on to what's yours. Keep what's yours. Fight 'em if you have to, but they'll respect you for it."

What Good Is an Editor?

*The relationship between an editor and the creators is partially summarized in this thought from **Jo Duffy**, who in her time has been both:*

The writer and the editor in me are always going hand-in-hand. Every time I'm reading a story, I watch to see, has my writer told me everything I need to know, if this is the first time I've met these characters? And are they telling me more than I need to know? I do that to myself. I do that for my editors before I get my work to them, and I try to watch for it in my writers before I pass a script or a plot.

Karen Berger: To me, being an editor means looking at what book you have and looking at the creative people involved and seeing if you like what they're doing. If you agree with their specific vision, and you think it's the right direction for the book, and if the creative team is doing everything right, then there's little that you're going to have to do.

I love the creative involvement — but if the people are getting all together on their own, then they don't need much from me. An editor is there to guide and to direct and if it is being well-directed by the involved talent, then it's just fun for me. I think an editor also provides good emotional stability between different people working on the book — mood or something.

KAREN BERGER & friend

A lot of being an editor is getting along well with the people that you're working with and making sure that they are relatively happy — being part therapist when you have to be — and part friend.

Mark Waid: I was an editor one day and not an editor the next. It didn't matter if I was right or not. The issue was that I shouldn't have been pissing off certain people. I didn't think of it as pissing off certain people, but apparently I was just a thorn in too many people's sides. It was eventually decided that it would be better for all parties concerned if I found a different way to serve DC Comics.

John Byrne: The editors who have been around longer seem to be the ones who understand that an editor's job is as much to leave it alone as to mess with it.

I have no problem with the editor as collaborator, but what I do have a problem with is the editor who views himself as the creative force on the book — who tells the writer and artist what to do, or tries to.

Ernie Colón: There's no question in my mind that all writers need editors, I don't care how brilliant they are. But what they really need is a *good* editor. And one of the rarities that you have in this business — and that's across-the-board, in any kind of publishing — is a good editor.

Chuck Dixon: It's a difference between editors — there's no company policy, I've found. Every editor is different. Whether it's a tiny little company with three titles or monoliths like Marvel or DC, there's really no difference, it's still a really personal business. It's your relationship with your editor and your penciller, that's what it gets down to.

Mark Gruenwald: There's no school where you can learn the art of being an editor, and there's no way you can learn what it takes to be a comic-book editor just by reading comics. Tom DeFalco set up a weekly session where we meet with all the assistants and talk about the craft of the medium and storytelling techniques and any and all questions pertaining to what it takes to edit a comic book. We get all assistant editors up in one room and we talk theory and practice. We'll discuss comic-book covers and try to determine what a good cover is.

William Messner-Loebs: It seems to me that there has to be a controlling force at some stage. It can be almost anybody, but if you're going to be successful then you have to have somebody sort of watching out, seeing how the ink falls, as it were. I've had writers tell me, you know, "Don't give those artists any slack at all 'cause most of them can't tell a story worth a damn." Then the artists take me aside and tell me horror stories about writers who have them doing two different actions with one person in one panel and then not understanding why it didn't come out that way. I don't think the real conflict here is between artist and writer. Somebody has to have a real commitment to the project, a unified vision of it.

Rick Norwood: An editor can't just publish his own tastes. He has to consider what the readers are going to like.

Jeff Rovin: Bill Dubay was running the editorial side at Warren Publishing. Bill never got a fair shake. I don't think *anybody* who is in that *kind* of position, where you have to interface between management and the creative side, *ever* gets a fair shake — Jim Shooter is another example — because anything you do is going to be wrong to someone.

An editor can be a source of inspiration to a creator without any direct, specific input — as we see in this tip from ***Mike Royer:***

Marv Wolfman and I, on one hand we both worked for the same company; he was the editor for the DISNEY ADVENTURE DIGEST. On the other hand, Marv was like a big, important person at Marvel and DC over the years. So when Marv gives me a job, I'm not working for Marv who is an editor at Disney, I'm working against every artist that has ever drawn something for Marv.

Val Semeiks: Frazetta's famous cover for WEIRD SCIENCE FANTASY #29, sometimes called "the greatest comic cover ever drawn" — I suspect that if I were to submit that cover layout today, it wouldn't be accepted. Or the editor would tell me to make the characters bigger, with less background, or something along those lines. It seems like editors almost have a checklist of requirements that a cover has to fill. If a cover doesn't meet the pre-set requirements, they don't know what to make of it and they would prefer not to use it.

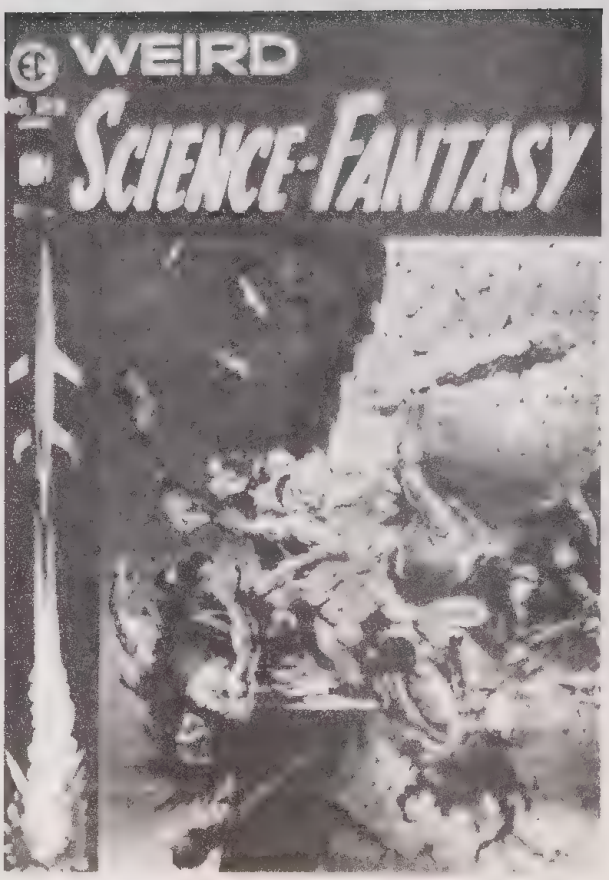
Jim Starlin: There's enough editors around where if you run into a real jerk you just go on to the next one. As you go along you find yourself a couple of good editors you can work with and you just stick working with them.

Randy Stradley: I hope we don't interfere editorially. Once in awhile something will come up where I'll just say, like, "Can't you find a better word than this," simply to avoid offending people needlessly. If not then we usually bow to the creator's will. Once we had a situation where one creator wanted to include racial slurs in something as a joke, which we totally vetoed, and in our contract that was our right.

Marc Swayze: When I wrote for Fawcett, I did it with the purpose of getting editorial approval, without which a writer does not sell. One of the best ways not to get approval was to violate an editorial taboo.

Bill Woolfolk: As a "story technician" who's won his spurs in comic books, magazines, movies, television and books, I am convinced that *any* story can be improved at least 25% by an editor or rewriter who understands not only the mechanics but the principles of narration. A poor story can be improved at least 100%, which I've proved time and again — too often in my own work.

Cat Yronwode: An editor is an organizer,



one who organizes individual plots, organizes the continuity of a story, character development and subplot development, organizes an entire line of comics for coherent artistic and literary standards of excellence.

Karen Berger: I think everyone needs an editor. Even if the editor doesn't do anything, you need someone to talk out ideas with. Not that writer/editors don't talk their ideas out — but you need an objective observer. You can suffer too much from tunnel vision. Even if the editor doesn't have as much experience as the writer — writers who have been at it for fifteen years get an editor who has been editing for one and they say, "What do *they* know about comics?" I can sit there and not agree with them on some points, but I still think that you need a third person. People just get too much wound up in themselves.

And finally, how much real power *does an editor have? Consider this tip from* ***Alvin Schwartz*** *on how far a creator can* push *an editor . . .*

Don Cameron absolutely hated Mort Weisinger. Once he got so fed up, he tried to push Mort out the window — truly. Later, he said

that DC was the only place where you could try to push an editor out the window and they'd still beg you to work for them.

What Is This Thing Called Professionalism?

This is the section where people carry on about meeting deadlines. If you find this a yawner, read it anyway, for two reasons: One, there's other stuff in here — professionalism covers all the little things you just have to do, even if you don't think it has much to do with Creating Art. Two, it's really, really important — more important than anyone outside a deadline-oriented industry can possibly know. When I was just breaking in, with perhaps a dozen or so scripts sold, an editor told me unequivocally that if he had a choice between giving an assignment to a creator whose work was of acceptable quality but not much more, but who always hit his deadlines, and a creator whose work was brilliant but never came in when it should — he'd pick the deadline hitter every time.

Making deadlines can get you work, but it may have other effects on you. Let's let ***Bob Burden*** *deliver the keynote tip this time, just to set the mood . . .*

From a production standpoint, being on a book with an unlimited number of issues is like standing on the ramparts of a Moorish castle as Christian soldiers are coming over the top, and you're trying to chop their heads off. And it's like, every time you turn around, there's this legion there, like armies rising from the dead; you know, skeletons coming out of the ground chasing after you, and you chop one's head off, and another one pops up from somewhere else. That's the terror you live under on a monthly book — like people living in the American embassy in the Mid-East are living in terror all the time, so are comic artists who have a monthly series.

Mark Borax: The deadline crunch is probably more responsible for prematurely aging comics creators than any one other thing, especially over the course of a lifetime.

Mike Friedrich: There are three things that define someone who works regularly in comics: they're a good talent, they do their work on time, and they're nice people. You need two out of those three to get steady work.

John Dixon: I never really discouraged anybody from doing comics for a living, but I liked to open people's eyes to the fact that this was a business; it was hard work. There's a lot of young fellows that think it's just going to be a lot of fun and games. They don't take it seriously.

Terry Beatty: It is quite hard to keep up reader interest if the book doesn't keep up schedule.

Paul Becton: If everyone has done the job on time — the penciller, letterer, or inker — then there's really no pressure. But if one guy breaks down in the chain, then all that extra pressure falls on the colorist. A lot of times I color pages that have no copy at all on them. No lettering, no sound effects, no nothing. Sometimes I have even colored pages that haven't even been inked.

Mark Borax: In our business a lot of creators have sort of an ebb and flow of finances; If they're working on a book the finances are flowing, and if they're not they're ebbing.

Nathaniel Branden: One of the compliments that I especially like is when people tell me that my writing is unusually clear, because that, for me, is my highest value as a writer — ahead of everything else, to be clear.

John Byrne: You still have to crank these things out every month. There's not much good in having a superstar who is a flake. If you've got a superstar and you get three issues out of him and then you have to do two fill-ins, he's not much use to you.

Mike Friedrich: We only allow ourselves to represent clients who are in it for the long term, because that's the kind of reputation we want to have. We want the editor to know the person is not a fly-by-night but someone they can deal with for years and years. We feel that the long-term relationships are much more profitable than any particular job that's happening at a time. Jobs come and go but your career is your life.

Sharon Cho: We had a case where a couple of our writers were asked to turn in a few stories almost overnight. One of them was slated to go on vacation. They called up and asked our opinion on the best move. We said, "Go on vacation. The vacation is much more important to your well-being than the money."

Gene Colan: I don't care if it's important or unimportant. It doesn't matter to me, because every job is a challenge, every job presents another story, and I try to bring my best to every job.

Julia Mather: Being a professional starts

with just that — approaching whatever you choose to do in life with a professional attitude. And it doesn't matter if you're performing an appendectomy — or inking Wonder Woman's breasts. Excelling at your craft is what makes you great.

Joe Colquhoun: Weekly serialization is one of the world's worst ways to make a living. From time to time, the deadlines and pressures become pretty punitive. The worst thing is when you're trying to get ahead for a holiday, and up comes bloody Easter and the office rings you up to say you've got to gain another four days. When you're working six or seven days a week, it's practically impossible — but somehow you do it.

Gerry Giovinco: Scheduling is really important. If you can be true to your word and be out there, right when you say you will be, you are going to earn a lot more respect.

Archie Goodwin: No matter how much lead time you give yourself, it always turns out to be six months less lead time than you feel you need.

Gerry Conway: People tend to blame other people for disappointments in life. Life is disappointing sometimes. When your relationship with a company falls apart you start acting as a bitter spouse. I don't think that's productive.

Jerry De Fuccio: For ten years I worked freelance at home, which was a bad experience, because at home there was no exchange . . . It was tough freelancing because I had never been out in the cold before.

JOE KUBERT

Mike Friedrich: Deadlines are a very, very real issue, one of *the* main issues that you have to deal with as a comics creator. Learning what your true pace is is a real tough art. The key is not how fast you are but how *honest* you are. If you are able to honestly tell your editor how long it's going to take you to do a piece that you're working on, *that's* what counts *more* than how fast you're going to turn it in. Even if this particular job isn't going to work out, your honesty will carry you forward into other jobs. They're very grateful to have people they can rely on. The editors want the least hassle from their artists and writers as they can get, because *they're* under tremendous pressure. They are anxious and grateful to work with talented people who know themselves and who therefore can be relied on to deliver when they say they'll deliver.

Denny O'Neil: I don't work particularly well without deadlines, without some kind of pressure. I think if I didn't have deadlines stuck into my life artificially I'd have to create them for myself.

Archie Goodwin: The biggest pitfall, as far as I'm concerned, is still deadlines. It is always a fight against deadlines, particularly in creator-owned comics where often the success of a comic will rise or fall on how well it meets its deadlines. I think to this day, too often creators will come into it thinking, "Hey, this is my own book, I can do anything I want." Well, yes, you can, but you still have to be a regular presence on the newsstand or in the store. It can affect whether a book lives or dies.

We had trouble with the COYOTE book early on, where Steve Leialoha left as the artist and it took a long time finding a replacement for him. That murdered the book schedule-wise and despite heroic efforts by Steve Englehart, COYOTE never quite recovered.

Joe Kubert: Cartoonists have to be like renaissance artists — they should be able to do anything. Because if this superhero genre really softens up, and there's a surplus of guys who can do the superhero stuff, there's gonna be a lot of people out there looking for work, if they can't do other things, like mystery or adventure.

John Byrne: There's a phrase I've heard repeatedly in the last couple of years — "It

doesn't really matter, we can always fix it."

I've heard that enough times that I'm tired of it. "What the hell — it's only comic books; we can do anything."

My response is: We can do anything up to a point. If you start taking that as your jumping-off point — we can trash it because it doesn't matter — then, eventually, the people who are reading it will start to think it doesn't matter and we'll lose them. That scares me. It's why I worry about the destructive attitude at DC these days, where everything that comes out is from the "everything you knew was a lie" school. I wonder how many times you can do that before the fans say, "If everything is a lie, then this version will be a lie according to the next guy. Why am I bothering to read this?"

Bob Larkin: Feast or famine. That's the great part about it, because when you get a job, it's that mystery. That nine-to-five stuff is the same old boring grind. But when you freelance, every job is different. You're constantly worried about paying the bills. You've got to go and hustle, and that's the exciting part of it. But to sit there nine-to-five and have somebody tell you what to do — I'd never have a steady job again, unless I had to. But I won't. Never again. Ever.

Stan Lee: Somebody was interested in a television version of THE BLACK WIDOW and they asked someone to write it. And I waited and I waited and I waited. The writer said he would do it, but he never sent it to me, and finally, the project died because the fellow who wanted to do it got another show, instead.

Rob Liefeld: I've learned a lot over the past year. Maybe the most important is out of sight, out of mind. It doesn't matter if you're talking comics, acting or the music business. One of the things we at Image have to improve upon is getting our product out on time.

Tom Lyle: You have to be willing to face rejection because there is going to be quite a bit. You're going to hear quite a few no's before the doors start to open. Once you're in the door, unless you're dumb and screw yourself up by not being reliable and meeting the deadline, you can stay in the industry. I've built a reputation by being reliable. And by trying to improve. The editors know that I am striving to do better and better. It's important to remember that comics are a business.

Pat Mills: If the story has been worked out properly you shouldn't have writer's block. The only problem that I have with writing is too many ideas, and the limitations of how many pages an artist can draw.

John Romita Jr.: I think artist's block is worse than writer's block, in that drawing is such a physical thing. I think artist's block lasts longer, too. I've had it where it lasted for several weeks, and I didn't get over it completely until months later. But I've always produced, even if the quality suffered.

Charles M. Schulz: People always used to ask me about what they call writer's block. I say writer's block is for amateurs. Cartoonists are like professional actors. The curtain goes up and you step out on the stage and you do it. A cartoonist knows that the paper comes out every day, and so you do it.

Kevin VanHook: Only a very little part of being a professional is being able to write and draw well. It's vital and gets your foot in the door. Turning your stuff in on time and being respectful of the next guy on the assembly line is just as important if not more so.

Jan Mullaney: There's a domino effect. If the book is late, there are a lot of things that get affected by it. Not only is the ordering system affected, but so is the production system. We've told the separators and the printers the amount of work they can expect every month. A production schedule has been set up, so every title that gets delayed can cause total chaos in that system.

Steve Oliff: Coloring is the tail-end of the process. If the writer takes an extra couple of days, and the artist, inker and letterer take a couple of days, all down the line, it gets screwed up — and then the colorist is stuck with, "Hey, we want it yesterday." You're stuck with cranking it out with no time to think about it.

Denny O'Neil: There is something to be said for the guy who only considers his work in comics a job and only does as much as is necessary, because he gets it in on time. The artistic temperament doesn't want to let go of a job until it's perfect, and that can take months. We're still in a periodical medium. And as much as it kills me to enforce deadlines, I've got to.

George Pérez: When you over-commit you tell one person you have plenty of time to do something while other things continue to pile up. You then start putting things off and then suddenly everything is due at the same time.

Ron Randall: When you're doing stuff that is creator-owned then obviously you're on top of

WALT SIMONSON self portrait

it, you're sort of on the edge pretty much all of the time, you've got a lot invested in it. But whichever way, whether it's work-for-hire or whether it's creator-owned, whether you're working plot-style or full-script or whatever, if you've got a story that's fun to work on, a story that has me revved up, then I'll just sort throw myself into it; and at the time that I'm doing the work I don't think, you know, about the terms that I'm doing this under.

John Romita Jr.: I try to average three pages a day, but I rarely do because of interruptions, personal life, or sheer laziness. Whatever the reason, I should work much faster than I do.

Steve Rude: One thing that I'm proud of is my own personal conduct at conventions. I try to keep in mind that people, whether *I* think so or not, perceive me as a role model — in the same way that I *idolized* people that I grew up emulating artistically. So, I conduct myself in a very professional manner.

Charles M. Schulz: I learned very early that editors want people working for them who get things done well but get them done on time and are reliable.

Dave Sim: If you start doing licensing, merchandising, translations and all of those sort of things, they all have to be accommodated into your day. Then you have to start allocating specific amounts of time. I write and draw the book for a living. CEREBUS is the central thing in my life, the thing I derive the most happiness from, the thing that I am best at, and the thing that I get the best results out of the effort I put in.

Once you realize the creating of the book is everything, then there are very few temptations. Anything that I agree to, or anything that I go after or that I accede to, is something that takes me away from the drawing board. Consequently, it has to go on the back burner.

Jon Davidge: There are all sorts of different techniques being used and different effects as well. We just have to be careful that the materials that the artists use are capable of being separated to make films from. We have to publish it; we don't commission the art to put it on the walls.

Walt Simonson: When you're doing a regular monthly book you don't have to think about what your next job is going to be. You can concentrate on the plots or getting the inking done. The trade off is now I have a greater freedom over what I can do. At the same time it requires more work because I have to get contracts squared away and such.

It's actually fun taking bits and pieces of different jobs and drawing different characters. One of the things I do miss from the monthly grind is the feedback from the fans. They know how to find you. When you're hopping around you don't have that fan connection.

As counterpoint to the above near-unanimity on the subject of deadlines, let's close off with this, from ***Bill Black:***

You know, 'way back in the '30s someone said that comic books come out monthly, and I have seen in many very young men a great deal of stress and physical impairments that come about because of these deadline problems.

Retailing: The Front Lines

Peter David: Much of what makes a book a success is how it's perceived by the retailers. If retailers believe that a book is going to be a slow seller, they will order accordingly, and thus create a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Mike Gold: I don't think we can reach women in traditional comic books because we can't get them into the comic-book stores and almost no comics are sold outside of comic-book stores. Comic book shops are very male places, decidedly male places, and many women who go into comic-book stores feel real creepy.

Kurt Goldzung: Retailers have to understand that selling comic books, even though it's a lot of fun for a lot of the people who get into the business — especially in today's market with the incredible amount of material coming out, you have to really *treat* it like a business. You know, you have to be on top of your inventory, you have to really know who your customers are — you really have to know what they want. You have to have it there for them when they want it.

Tony Isabella: A good location, to my mind, has a lot of the right kind of traffic — if you are near a high school, if you are near a college, if you are near a business area, you are going to have a lot of walk-by traffic. You might be able to get cheap rent out in the sticks, but by the same token if your customers have to drive there, they might not come as often.

Diana Schutz: Things that Comics and Comix was definitely doing right: Their fixtures were modular, the lights were bright, they changed their window display once a week, and they presented themselves as a class act.

Tony Isabella: Everybody who works for me reads comics.

David Anthony Kraft: This is what has never made sense about retailer ordering patterns. When there are lots of hot new releases retailers often cut their orders on regular long-standing titles to buy more of what's "hot" that month. But in so doing, they lose the steady, month-after-month sales built up over years by established publications such as COMICS INTERVIEW. Sales that are the bread and butter of the industry.

Dennis Mallonee: The dollar volume for retailers that actually carry FLARE exceeds ninety percent of the product produced by Marvel or DC. This is not true in general, because clearly half the retailers won't carry anything that isn't published by Marvel or DC.

If a retailer sells 90 copies of CAPTAIN AMERICA at $1.25, he brings in $112.50. But if he sells 29 copies of FLARE at $3.95, he brings in $114.55. Which one is producing more revenue?

Todd McFarlane: As a retailer — I stopped trying to figure out *why* a lot of people want this stuff and really see my duty more or less to supply what the demand is. Some guys feel that they have to go out there and kind of educate the readers — "Don't read *that* garbage," and whatever else. I guess I do to a small extent, but I'm not there to do that. I'm assuming the kid's reading the book because he likes it. And yeah, I'm going to point out the books that I might think are of a little bit higher grade or quality or something like that.

Frank Miller: I want to see comics shops that show you 60 years' worth of comics history — not one month's. If work is of value, I want to see it available to the readers. I essentially want the life of a novelist.

Diana Schutz: You have to understand that you're selling a product, that you are a retailer. You have to learn the tricks of retailing. You have to attract people to your store if you want to increase your customer base.

Tony Isabella: We carry Archie, and while a good Archie title sells about a tenth as well as a good superhero title, we do make it a point to carry all of them. They do have their loyal clientele, and I do wish that more people would take a look at some of this non-superhero material.

David Scroggy: The key to diversifying comic-book material is getting the proper audience into the comic-book stores. It all gets down to the front line — the retailers. We need to see comic-book stores start to appear in malls, with a little more sophisticated presentation — a little nicer store, more appealing, perhaps — and get more and more women into the comic-book stores and looking at the material.

What's It Gonna Be Worth?

***Mike Kazaleh** echoes many creators when he says: I prefer readers to speculators.*

Ed Hannigan: I don't want to upset the apple cart too much, but I really think that the collector market in comics is a bunch of [redacted] I can say that with a little bit of experience because my mother was for many years an antique dealer. We would buy and sell antiques and stuff, collectibles. What's happened is . . . there was a collectibles market in those little figurines, little porcelain sentimental sculptures. When they first came out they were hand-crafted and very few of them were made, so they were valuable because they were rare, and some people started collecting them. But it's like Doritos, you know, "Crunch all you want, we'll make more!"

So, lots of people pay money and collect those schlocky figurines now, but they really have no value. All they do is estimate the market and say, "Hmm, I think we can sell three million." Now, people who buy them because they *like*

them, fine, I have no quarrel with them — except I think they have lousy taste. But people who buy them because they think they're going to go up in value and someday they can sell them, they're fooling themselves! The only people who will be in the market for those things are other people who are also buying them to someday sell to other people. Well, the same thing is true of comics — "Crunch all you want, we'll make more!"

If I was a kid again and had money to spend on comics, I would buy a whole variety of comics. I wouldn't buy five of the same comic. Then again, maybe I don't know because I'm not a collector.

David Anthony Kraft: I had many of my comics bound into handsome books that still grace my study today. They are easy to access, always in order and easy to read, and very easy to store. Imagine my amazement at the assertion that this vastly superior (and certainly more costly) method supposedly *devalues* the comics in the opinion of some collectors!

It all comes down to this: my comics are there to be read, used, enjoyed — to enhance my life — not carefully stored away like stock certificates to speculate upon what future value they may (or may not) someday hold in someone *else's* life.

When all is said and done it is, I suppose, the difference between collecting — and living.

John Kricfalusi: People are just going to have to admit they're stupid if they pay more than the cover price. Comics are worth the cover price, period.

Dennis Mallonee: We emphatically do *not* want distributors and retailers to pursue the unethical marketing strategy of promoting as collectibles millions of copies of things that will never *be* collectible.

Don Markstein: Two weeks after the Superman snuff issue came out, I saw a store owner touting a twelve-dollar copy to a prospective buyer, one of so very, very many who entered a comic shop for the first time ever, just for this event. "Look how much it's already increased in value!" Right. I wasn't going to stand in the guy's own store and undermine a possible sale, but what I *wanted* to say was wait a couple years and see if it *holds* that value. Wait five years, and look for it in the three-for-a-dollar bin.

Charles Novinskie: There is a flaw in the collector mentality. You can say that you've invested in Golden Age and even Silver Age books because of their scarcity, but to say you've invested in a book that has several million copies circulating seems like flawed thinking.

Ed Hannigan: I would say this, kids — first, don't do drugs. Second, buy comic books if you like them, if you like to *read* them. If you're buying them as an investment, it's a stupid investment. Buy savings bonds. As an investment, they're lousy. They take up a lot of space, they're hard to lug around, they're really labor intensive when it comes right down to it. If you go to any flea market you'll find people there with boxes and boxes of them.

Understanding and Using the Market

An artist *can starve in a garret if he likes — in fact, it could be argued that the only modern usage of the word "garret" is "a place where artists starve". But the comics* industry *is a commercial one, and commerce implies consumers. A professional in our industry must, like those in any other medium of entertainment, play to his audience.*

Berke Breathed: Look at the comic pages. You don't have any more strips like POGO or LI'L ABNER or anything with an ensemble of characters. You have a strip about a single neurotic young woman named Cathy that has nothing but women problems, and no one reads that strip except for women just like her. You have a strip about divorce only, you have a strip about grandparents, you have a strip about all these different things. Well, they're narrowing their audiences. It's easier for the newspapers to get a grab on what the strip's about by reading one or two strips. More importantly, it is easy to sell, since you can target your audience.

Peter David: Purely on the basis of career advancement, the books that focus on the mutant characters are the ones that get the greatest attention from the fan base.

John Byrne: The best thing about doing the X-books is the ton of cash that automatically comes with it.

Sharon Cho: We may have an artist who is fantastic and we recognize the genius in him — we *see* it — however, if commercially that type of style is not working, is not selling well, our best efforts won't get anywhere.

Peter David: In the same way as I analyzed what made a book saleable to a retailer, and to

the fans, I also said, "What kind of a story can I do that is going to get the attention of an editor?" And the idea was to present the editor with something he hasn't really seen before.

Jo Duffy: No matter how long a series has run, and how many readers it has, people ought to be able to pick up any given issue of something and follow it, even if they're seeing it for the first time.

Mike Friedrich: I see a lot of growth *slowly* occurring in the children's and older adults' areas, as well as an expansion of the kind of material in the young adult audience towards women as well as towards men.

Neil Gaiman: Putting other DC characters in BLACK ORCHID was a combination of the thrill of being let loose in the sweet shop, and a commercial decision — not from the viewpoint of selling it to the public, but rather to sell it to DC. That was why we didn't come up with something that was ours and try to sell it to DC. What we did was take an old DC character and say, "You'll own the project, and we're going to have all these DC characters running through it."

Larry Hama: I think that the major part of the market that buys comics is between eight and thirteen years old or thereabouts. I try not to write down. I figure if they don't understand something, then they can look it up. I also figure that any kid that's reading a comic *is* reading, which probably makes him a cut above other kids in his age group who never read anything other than what they are required to read in school. And I figure what they want from a comic is an entertaining read.

Steve Leialoha: When I do stuff for Marvel Comics, I try to keep up with what the general Marvel Comics audience is interested in. But at the same time I try to get into the frame of mind of what I used to like when I was that age, and then I try to do comics the way I would have liked, or still like, and try to come up with something interesting on that level.

Jack Jackson: The artist walks a tight rope between commercial considerations and personal regard for what they do. Too much commercialization and they become prostitutes and lose respect for their work; too much freedom and they starve to death or have to take menial jobs to support their "death to the oppressor" stance. The fact remains that the comics medium is a viable vehicle. Buying gas for the trip will always be a problem.

Mike Friedrich: There's no perfect publisher out there. But if you like to produce material that the current marketplace is interested in buying, then there is a wide range of options for you. I think the *major* battles over the position of creators in the industry were fought in the '80s and were won and are pretty much over.

Steve Gerber: If you don't have a first issue then you don't have a comic book. People judge entire series on the basis of a first issue and they won't *look* at it afterwards if the first issue doesn't impress them a great deal.

David Mazzucchelli: Mainstream comics are commercial. That's what they are by nature. Marvel and DC, as companies, have a job. And their job is to sell as many comics as they can. If you work for them, then you help them make money that way.

Doug Moench: The market for comics in this country is primarily kids and teenagers and the direct sales shops have barely changed that fact. The best I can do is try to turn out stories which appeal to teenagers *and* adults, something

JACK JACKSON

which does not really seem so very hard to do. Adults don't *demand* blood and tits.

Fabian Nicieza: I see myself as a multi-faceted personality in regards to my ability to understand that I work for a publishing company that publishes to a broad spectrum of readers. I think it is obvious when you look at what I edit and what I write, that I believe in that. You have not seen any ALF covers with blood-splattered, executed people on it because I think it will sell. I understand that as a publishing company we should sell to a many different people as possible. That includes little kids, little girls. We need more people in the industry and we won't have older readers unless we cultivate younger readers. That is part of my job, to try to cultivate younger readers.

Larry Hama: Most of the girls that write in to GI JOE say the reason they like the comic is the women characters are simply part of the team. They don't go around with their palms nailed to their foreheads. They're competent, straightforward, and they go ahead and get the job done.

*The following tip, from **Jim Mooney**, is addressed not to the general audience, but to the canny editor:*

At this time it's a little bit *difficult* — the field has changed so much and they're looking for kids like Frank Miller and Bill Sienkiewicz and the younger *enfants terrible* — we older guys, although we're still competent, are not necessarily that much in demand.

*Note: Although **John Romita Sr.** is very strongly associated with Marvel nowadays, at the time he speaks of in the following tip, he was working mostly on DC's romance line.*

When FANTASTIC FOUR #1 came out I could hear the grumblings of the DC editors. We had a meeting. They invited in all the freelancers and they had Stan's books — the covers — on the wall. And they had beside them the DC covers. And the editors were saying, "We don't know what's happening. Stan Lee is starting to sell a lot of books. The stuff looks like garbage; our stuff is beautiful. We don't know what's causing this." There were all sorts of theories. It never dawned on them that the characters were becoming human, and theirs weren't.

Joe Rubinstein: You're in a business, and you want to be able to make money to support yourself. But ultimately, I think you should do what is good, and then let somebody discover it's good.

Richard Pini: We would rather publish the things I want to publish and reach the people who are interested. I'd rather maintain a moderate level of success than try to bust the bank with seven or ten or fifteen different titles, spread myself too thin, and not be able to devote the time and caring to them that I think they deserve.

Jim Salicrup: I don't feel that I have the most sophisticated taste in the world, so that when I like something, usually millions of other people will like it also.

Ken Steacy: I don't think Maurice Sendak is talking down to his audience when he's writing children's books. I think he knows his audience, he's gotten inside their heads, knows how to speak to that audience, and he does it effectively. And I think that any responsible artist who is interested in communicating with his audience has to do that. A lot of people in the industry do talk down to their audience, and I think that's very wrong.

Marv Wolfman: Doing a TEEN TITANS special aimed at young kids, the approach I took was identical to writing a regular comic. My feeling is just write it the way I want. Every time I try to write down, like I did with "Dial H for Hero", the books bomb.

Promotion

Everything, to sell well, must be promoted. Lest you think this isn't your personal bailiwick, keep in mind — if you want to make comics, you have a product to sell: your talent, your work, your self. Much of what is discussed here relates directly to that, and there isn't a word in this section that the would-be comics creator can't benefit by keeping in mind.

Jerry De Fuccio: I was recently looking at a GREEN LANTERN cover and I just threw it in the trash. I grew up with the concept that the cover should be like a poster and that it should be discernable from afar. At CRACKED we do a lot of white backgrounds because it's very readable.

Mark Freedman: A lot of people out there look for trends in the marketplace, particularly in the toy business. They say, "Oh, gee, I think *space* will be a good thing for the next few years." I used to believe that, but I don't anymore. I've learned that you have to *create* the trend, not follow it. That's really the key to a major success. It's the first one out that *makes*, let's say, space happen, or the Old West happen, or — like

TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES — a ninja spoof concept happen.

So, rather than look for a theme or a trend, I look for just a great concept. If a concept is great then it doesn't matter what the so-called trend is, because a trend is just how the so-called conventional wisdom people are stereotyping what's happening out there for the moment. So I look for things that are just generally good.

Batton Lash: At one point talk was maybe they would drop the strip, so at my own expense I had buttons created — I'M DEFENDED BY WOLFF & BYRD, COUNSELORS OF THE MACABRE, with a shot of Wolff and Byrd and the name of the paper — and I just put in the strip, "Send for your free button." The response was pretty good, like close to 100. Of course that made me *broke* for that period. But I didn't care. So every few years I'll do what I call a button drive just to see if they're still out there, and the response always gets better.

Stan Lee: I think the most important thing in selling is to make sure that you have a good product that you, yourself, believe in. The next most important thing is that you better be able to explain it as colorfully and as dramatically as possible, to make the person that you are presenting it to want it so badly that he drools at the mouth. I guess you have to be half actor, half politician and diplomat. Even if you are an artist or a writer, the point is in convincing other people that what you are doing is good. Either people don't know or they are afraid to trust their own judgment. They need you to tell them it is good and to convince them — so that they start to believe it.

David Mazzucchelli: People figured they could sell more copies of RUBBER BLANKET if they could push me as the ex-artist of DAREDEVIL and BATMAN. One of my ideas to sell a lot of copies was to do a superhero on the cover and then shrink-wrap the book.

Todd McFarlane: In terms of marketing, if everybody had a funny car, I'd put my logo on the side of an elephant. When everybody else was doing foil and all the graphic covers, I said fuck foil, I'm going to get Alan Moore.

Batton Lash: The comic-book market is so weird. The market likes to preach to the converted. I'd like to hit that main audience that doesn't normally read comics.

Bill Oakley: A good logo, first of all, has got to be a good design, obviously. It should be nice and bold. It should be something that when you see it in the store it should pop out from across the room. You should be able to spot it. You should be able to read it from across the room. It shouldn't die on the cover.

Rod Reed: I'm the one who thought up the city-visiting gimmick for Captain Marvel and persuaded the brass it would be a circulation builder. As the series developed, a distributor in each town would provide us with data as to the leading citizens, unusual sights, principal streets, main industry and anything else that might serve as background.

John Romita Sr.: Stan made the covers very important. His attitude was that if the comic doesn't have a good cover, nobody is going to notice it. We have to give it a dynamite cover. I always felt that was my obligation. When I did a cover sketch, I felt I had to make it a knock-out cover sketch. Problem is, you couldn't do a knock-out cover every time. Sometimes, we had to do a storytelling cover, but I enjoyed the startling ones.

Joe Rubinstein: I look at conventions as like going on the Carson show — you push the product.

Todd McFarlane: The one good thing about being where I'm at right now with Image Comics is that I get to control my own destiny. Part of the destiny is that I get to control marketing. You're better off giving information to readers and dealers and distributors as close to ordering as possible. When you let it out, they get excited, but they don't stay excited for eight months. They think, "Yeah, this is cool." But just before the ordering comes out, and just before all the distributors produce their catalogues, I drop the one piece of information that I neglected to tell everybody that was a calculated neglect. "Oh, by the way, since you're excited up to a level of 3, let me pop it up to a level of 6 here."

Jim Salicrup: We don't want to announce things too far in advance because there's a lot of gossip in this industry and we don't want the news to get old fast. We want to maintain excitement about a project at the time when it is being solicited. Timing is everything.

Liberty with Licensed Properties

The care and pleasing of licensors is an art unto itself. Many people just getting into the

comics industry find themselves immediately having to deal with an extra set of unseen editors, who often combine the temperament of an artist with the soul of a corporation — and who very often display little or no understanding of our own special medium. Here are a few tips on dealing with licensed properties . . .

John Arcudi: There are certain definite parameters that are set with a film property, by the licensor, and you have to keep that in mind. When you're working on something of your own, you don't.

On the other hand, with something you create, you are trying to get a specific point, image or character across, and you have to work at it. I've rewritten some of my things four, five, six times. With something like PREDATOR, once the parameters are set for you, you can launch forward with that.

I have no problems with working within parameters. Obviously, when I was working at Marvel, there were jillions of them. But it does put limitations on what you have in mind. You can't take the same sort of license with PREDATOR as with your own characters, to say, "The Predator thinks this way." No — the Predator thinks whatever way the licensor tells you he does.

Peter David: When you're doing something for Disney, as with any licensed product, it goes through so many hands and so many eyes and so many stages of approval, if you don't do full scripts, all you're doing is doubling the amount of time the approval process will take. Persons A through Z will have to look at every stage of the process; it's madness to do a plot, have it approved; the art, have it approved; the script, and have it approved. So you do the whole script at the outset — plot, panel breadowns and dialogue — and you have some hope of getting it done in some civilized amount of time.

Don Heck: Doing adaptations was a little bit rough, because you really don't have the time to get the character down right. You're trying to draw portraits and some people are a little more gifted at it than others. You really had to do a caricature of the person, in order to be able to draw them, panel after panel. I was having trouble with Napoleon Solo. That's why I was glad when I was given a regular character like Iron Man.

Mike Kazaleh: If you get into a licensed comic book like with the Warner Bros. people, then you'd go through headaches about the regulations and style guides and approval.

Randy Stradley: Editing on a licensed property is very different. Normally, you're sort of the go-between for the publisher and the creative team, sometimes between the writer and artist. Licensing just adds another corner to the triangle. You have to keep everyone happy and keep the product as undiluted as possible. It adds a degree of difficulty and adds time to the process.

Dan Thorsland: You have to coordinate it and make sure a STAR WARS novel does not contradict a STAR WARS comic which does not contradict a STAR WARS radio play or video game. You have to look at the massive wads of reference and glean the real continuity from it.

Dan Slott: I feel that it is my obligation, when I'm working on a licensed property, to make it as much like the original form of the property as possible. People that are buying the book, for the most part I'm sure, are people who have seen the show and are buying the comic book because they expect to be entertained in a similar fashion.

I don't care if I'm writing REN & STIMPY, ALIENS, or PREDATOR, if it's a licensed character it's my job to provide that character continuity. You're going to get Dan Slott spill-off, but you'll also get the continuity.

Randy Stradley: The kind of balls-out action that you saw in the movie ALIENS works wonderfully on film. The action in PREDATOR works much better on film than if you tried to do exactly the same story in comics. In comics, because you're telling the story in a series of freeze-frame as opposed to moving images — you don't have sound, you don't have music, you don't have the immediacy of the actors' voices — you have to play on the reader's imagination and work harder toward getting them inside the characters' heads, at least identifying with the main characters enough that their suspension of disbelief is held.

Mark Verheiden: The fun thing about springing off from movies — especially movies as rich as ALIENS — is that you have this huge subtext that you can draw from for ideas. You can go back and pull out little things that happened in the film and spring off entire storylines from them. That's fun, to have that sort of textual basis to rise up from and expand upon.

IV. The Art of Comics

Vision and Artistic Truth

Chris Bachalo: I made a promise to myself that when I got into comics, I was going to do what I was interested in. I wasn't going to follow anybody else's style. I was going to do my style and tell the story the way I wanted to tell it. I was going to do characters the way I thought they should be.

Kyle Baker: If you do something new, nobody believes you're doing it on purpose. For instance, the stuff I'm doing now has no variation in line weight. You know how most comic books have thick lines and thin lines because they're all done with a brush? I generally use the same line weight. I've been using markers for the past two years.

Again, nobody believes you really want to do that, and they try and teach you how to make the lines thick and thin. If they've never seen it before, you have to show them that you really meant it. Also, I'm young, and they're trying to help me out, giving me art tips, and I'm trying to sort out which ones are legitimate and which ones are them not getting it.

JOHN OSTRANDER

I did COWBOY WALLY exactly the way I wanted to do it. It came out, and all of a sudden everybody in comics looked at it and said, "Oh, *that's* what he meant. I guess he *can* do that."

Dan Barry: Charlie Biro called me in one day. He said, "I like your stories, I like the *intensity,* but these women are lousy." And I used the same approach I've always used. "This is me. You know, I'm good at some things, I'm not good at others. You like my work, you buy it. You don't like it, don't criticize it, fire me." This is the way I've always dealt with editors. I've got a reputation for being a hard ass and short tempered. Bullshit. I just knew I could not be Jack Kirby. I could not be Caniff. I could not be Raymond. This is the way I draw and you either like it or you don't like it.

Terry Beatty: I respect artists that have a distinctly personal style, and make a strong statement with their artwork. Frank Robbins is certainly one and so is Johnny Craig.

John Celardo: Whenever you take on an established strip, you try to make the transition seamless, but eventually your own style creeps in and dominates. In the case of my taking over BUZ SAWYER from Hank Schlensker, this use of the duo-tone paper, which I've continued, has maintained the look of the strip, I suppose. You can't copy another artist's style, anyway; the way you handle a pencil and a pen always comes through, no matter how hard you try.

John Ostrander: On my first couple of issues of STARSLAYER, I was trying to come as close as I could to a Grellian approach, because I felt at the time I didn't want to lose Grell's readers. I found out later that those people who were buying it for Grell didn't stay around anyway.

J.M. DeMatteis: All the best work — and I'm not just talking about comics here — comes out of someone with something to say, something unique to him or her . . . some inner drive or demon. Better Steve Gerber experimenting and failing than a thousand "successful" Stan Lee clones.

Frank Frazetta: Some artists worry too much about opening themselves to ridicule if

it's less than perfect or less than wonderful. I'd rather that it's less than perfect. I think that's the essence of it. It can be less than perfect, if it's honest.

So what if the ankle's not in the right place? That's nonsense. That isn't what art's all about. Don't worry about perfect duplication of what's out there. That's not what art is.

Keith Giffen: I was told to draw like Kirby, and then when I did, everyone told me he was passé. I asked them how they wanted me to draw, and they said, like Keith Giffen.

Dan Jurgens: A lot of working in comics, I think, is having confidence in what you're doing. I think everybody, when they start in the business, is a little hesitant to take chances, because if you've just been put on a book that someone else has been working on you have to look at what they did and borrow from them. Also, I think when you start working in the business, it takes a period of several years to find yourself, and until you've done that, I don't think you can really move in and create anything right away that's going to have its own real strong sense of direction.

Goseki Kojima: You draw the picture by your own nerve. You have to be a lone wolf. Every human being is not created equal. Comics can't be taught in school. Even if you become my assistant for 20 years, you will only be a copy man. I know a brilliant comics artist who became an assistant to a famous artist, and now the master gives him a direction and everyone else copies from this chief assistant. The creativity stops right there. All the pictures start to level off the same.

Kelley Jones: I'm an artist first. If I do write for myself, it's because I have stories I want to tell, not because I want to keep all the money for myself.

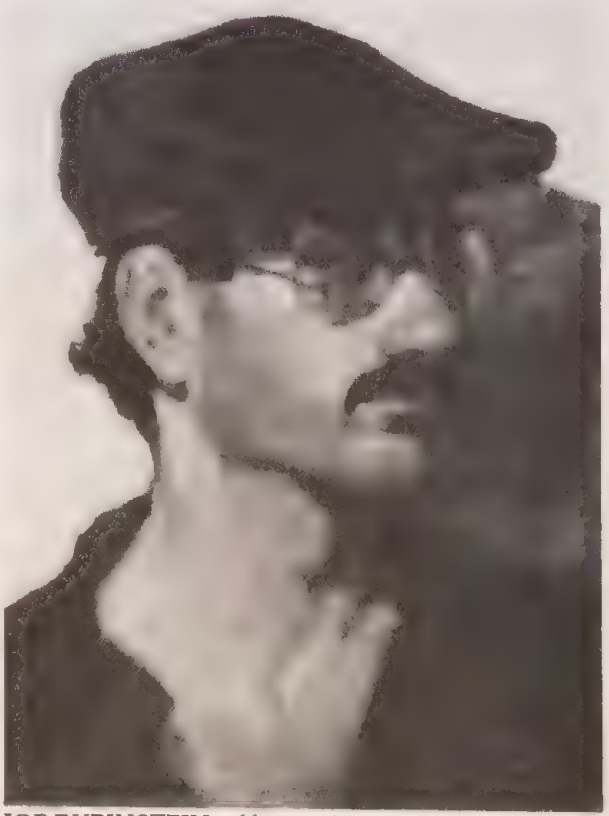
Rob Liefeld: I have never done anything for money. I love drawing comics, I love seeing the books printed. When the book comes from the printer and it's a job well done, that's when I'm the happiest guy in the world. There's nothing like the satisfaction. Nobody in my studio does this work for the money. Granted, the money is a nice added bonus. I do all of it for the creative process; I'm not motivated by money.

David Mazzucchelli: The most exciting work to me seems to be the work by creators who have something that they have to say. If comics are ever going to be accepted by a wider readership I think the work that will draw attention will come from the bottom up.

Todd McFarlane: You may think I'm crazy and I'm going on a suicide trip and you think I shouldn't be doing this . . . fuck you. I'm going to do it my way. Even if it doesn't work, it wasn't supposed to work. That's the greatest thing about taking a suicide trip. If you take the suicide trip and you die, you were supposed to! Nobody gave you any chances of living. If you pull it off, the one in a million chance you pull it off, you'll look like a genius. That's always been the path that I love to take.

Frank Miller: I spent most of the first few years of my career just shooting from the hip — you know, going by my instincts and writing and drawing with adrenalin. And as I got more freedom, I had to start articulating, more and more, what it was I wanted to do.

Joe Rubinstein: If an artist or a musician — any sort of creative person — allows the public to dictate his work, he's a dead man. People picked up RONIN and said, "This is not DAREDEVIL." If Frank had decided to do that he would have been in very big trouble. Frank wanted to stretch.



JOE RUBINSTEIN self portrait

Of course, nobody liked it at first, because they didn't know what to take from it.

You just have to sort of get blinders on and decide, "This is what I'm after in my stuff," and keep going for it. So as far as the artwork in RONIN goes, I thought Frank was experimenting, and that's the thing about experiments — you never know if they're going to fail or not. I like Frank's DAREDEVIL work better myself, artistically speaking, but as a package, RONIN probably set some real precedents.

Mike Richardson: We don't come in and say we think there should be this many action pages or they should concentrate on this character, and that's as it should be. We have a philosophy that when creators are allowed to work on something they really care about, something that means something to them, they do their best work, and so far in our case that seems to have worked pretty much across the board.

Denny O'Neil: All other things being equal, creative people generally perform better if they have a genuine emotional commitment to the material.

Dan Thorsland: If I have a pool of people to draw from and they're all equally talented and one may be a big name and not really care for the material that much, and the other may not be as big a name but just loves the stuff, I will go for the guy or girl who loves the stuff. I know they're going to give 110% and be there every month.

Wendy Pini: If you are going to be in this line of work, you have a responsibility to learn about yourself and about your own motivations for what you are doing — 'cause sloppy thinking leads to sloppy work.

Steve Ringgenberg: I'm not a big fan of writers like Henry James who are unbearably wordy. I can't read his stuff. Another reason I don't like James is the stories he chooses to tell. I have no interest in the characters he's writing about. That's something else for writers to think about, is what story are you telling. Pick your story. Choose the characters you're talking about. My bottom line is I tell a story that I am interested in. I'm telling the kind of story that I would like to read, that I am interested in, and hope there are enough people out there who find the same kind of story entertaining that the book will go over well.

Mike Royer: A lot of times something that you do is a means to an end. Maybe what you spend most of your life at enables you to pay the mortgage, send flowers to your wife, put the kids through school. It doesn't allow you the opportunity to take chances. When I became unmarried 12 years ago I thought about taking all of those chances that I couldn't take when I was married. Then all of a sudden, when the opportunity was there, I wasn't sure if that was what I wanted. I spent a few years trying to figure out what the hell I wanted to do.

It's a shame that it took me to age 50 to get excited about what I'm doing!

P. Craig Russell: I don't think there's such a thing as growing beyond comics. You might reach a point where you've used up all your resources, or where the market won't support you, but if you've grown "beyond" it, you've simply stopped asking questions.

Or, you may grow in a different direction, finding you can say something with a single image that you can't with a succession of images. And that's perfectly valid. But you haven't "gone beyond it," you just moved to something else or in another direction.

Dave Sim: If you really, really wanted to do something and it just dropped out of your pen, that's what people are going to respond to.

Kevin VanHook: There's been a trend in the last few years of people getting work by mimicking hot artists. It happened earlier. In the '70s, people mimicked Neal Adams and got work. I would recommend not doing that. It's tough. That kind of thing's always a fad. There's a time when that fad runs out. Then you have a tough time trying to draw things another way.

Bill Sienkiewicz: If you look at all of the Neal Adams "clones" that there have been, I got the most *shit* for it all because I did it better than anybody else. People still make occasional remarks — people that have obviously not been watching my work. I feel that I learned a great deal about art and drawing, and basically, Neal's stuff got me through a lot of rough times. As obsessive as I got about it, it really was a lot for me to hold onto. It really was a focus for me during some pretty rough times as a kid. After I let it go — which is really a hard thing to do — when I did start to let go of it I went gangbusters. I felt there was a whole world out there. I was basically a whore — I was sleeping around with every style there was, and loving it! What I wanted to do was say, "Look, this is what comics can be!"

Matt Wagner: When I first signed on to do THE DEMON mini-series for DC some time ago now, I thought, "Wow! Mecca! I'm working for DC, the big guys." Since then, I've realized my real Mecca was MAGE — that was where the freedom was, where the real expression was coming from.

Chris Warner: I think plenty of the writers and artists in this business are capable of doing a lot better work than they're doing, but there's no incentive for them. When I was first trying to break into this business I remember an editor at Marvel was looking at my work and seeing how detailed it was, and he said, "You know you get paid by the page." You get paid the same amount per page whether you do one page a day or five pages a day and that's eventually kind of knocked into everyone's head in a kind of subliminal way, I think; that if mediocre work is acceptable, why not just do it?

Unless you yourself want to do superior work and are willing to fight for it and go through a lot of hell you have to do it on your own pretty much.

What Makes an Artist: Drive and Dedication

Simon Bisley: I find color work can become labored. It can detract from the story. It's also far, far too time consuming. My energy level is like a container full of liquid. When I'm painting, the liquid goes down kind of gradually and eventually empties. With black-and-white artwork, there's a bigger reserve, and you can continue hammering out this black-and-white artwork and sustaining a high level of energy, and it's easier. Because when you paint something, you initially draw or ink it down, and that energy is used up. And the minute you start to paint, it's almost like you're having to paint the picture all over again.

Vince Fago: People that write or draw for a living have a certain talent. That in some ways is a disadvantage. You could make more money as an insurance salesman or something but the fact that you love your work and that you love what you're doing is critical. I once had a friend at the Herald Tribune who said if they'd just bring his food on a plate that he'd continue to draw; he was willing to work for the food. Artists and writers love their work and they want to continue doing it all of their lives. That's the difficult part, because you get laid off, or a character goes out of style, and you find yourself out of work.

Mike Friedrich: You have to have a strong ego to be able to create work in the first place. If you don't have a strong ego you don't belong in comics. If you don't believe in what you're doing, why are you doing it? You *have* to believe in what you're doing.

Neil Gaiman: If I was doing this for the money, I would go to Hollywood.

Jack Kirby: There are no failures in life — just people who quit too soon. I believe everybody has the same potential. I have the same potential to play the piano. Given time I could be Paderewski, but I have no inclination to play the piano. And it won't matter to me, see. Something captured my interest and I stayed with it.

Scott McCloud: There's a real freedom in 9-to-5 jobs, which I've lost now that I'm a freelancer, because there's no longer any such thing as "free time" when you're a freelancer.

Moebius: When an artist starts to work he must be ready for two possibilities — to be rich and famous, or poor and unknown. And the two possibilities are very dangerous. The first one because, if you're well-known and rich you lose your drive. You become fat and lazy. If you are poor and unknown you are not able to work. You have to think about food, survival. You become very bitter.

But I try to be ready for both. If I become poor and unknown, I must be able to do it without any bitterness — still able to survive. If I become rich and famous, I must be able to do it with control, in the money, and control, in the relation with the audience.

Denny O'Neil: As a general rule, if the creative people are really involved in a storyline, that will involve the readers as well. Everybody will be doing their best work. And people who really like comics as a narrative form will respond to that.

Mike Royer: I try to push myself with everything. I try to create challenges and then try to meet them. I'm having fun pushing myself. Success is the progressive realization of a goal. If you don't set goals and strive for them, you won't have any success.

Joe Rubinstein: The big difference between the modern day artists and writers and the golden age artists and writers is — the golden age artists were guys who fell into comics and said, "I really want to be an illustrator, or do

SATURDAY EVENING POST covers, but I'll do comic books for the moment." Now, it's like, "Oh, all I ever wanted to be was a comic-book artist," and that's great, but unfortunately they set their goals too low. The first day they give you a script to draw, you're a comic-book artist, so where have you gone with your goals? You have to keep setting your goals higher and higher or you will in effect wither on the vine in comic books.

Steve Rude: I have encountered burn-out about four times in my career drawing NEXUS. The first time it happened it was devastating. Like any first-time occurrence, you're left not knowing how to deal with it. I had a tremendous feeling of guilt that I am unable to perform, that I'm letting people down.

I solved it by realizing that I was breaking down because mentally I couldn't go on anymore. This is simply the *clinical* way of looking at it. There was something wrong; I had to listen to what my mind was telling me. Instead of feeling guilty and making it even worse upon myself, I had to look at what happened and not be so hard on myself.

I was so hard on myself back then that I literally almost killed myself over the work, and then the guilt came on top of not being able to work. Having survived it, I look back and realize that it happened for a reason; and it wasn't a *bad* reason. I shouldn't feel bad for having had it happen to me.

I'm at a loss to explain how others can resolve it. Just take your mental health very seriously. We're so hard on ourselves . . . just be aware that these things are going to happen. Mike Baron gave me some good advice: "You are responsible for your mental health." And when that started to sink in, I started to cut the [redacted].

Charles M. Schulz: You do hit slumps, where you are no longer able to judge your work. I have often wanted to make a collection of comic strips where it was quite evident to me that the cartoonist had drawn something which was not only what we would call "not funny" but was simply not a gag at all but he wasn't aware of it. He had hit this point in his work where he was no longer able to judge what he had done, whether or not it was funny. These are the little times that you have to beware of because it will happen to you and you don't know it.

Jim Starlin: I think burnout — it's a very common occurrence for all of us, I think. No matter what kind of money you're talking about, you do something for two or three years, especially in a business as *solitary* as comics, it just gets to the point where you get really sick of those characters.

Jim Valentino: Something that keeps you going is if you're feeding a family. That's a real good motivational factor.

Where Do You Get Your Ideas?

Mike Baron: Many of the Punisher's adventures are inspired by history, contemporary crime, what's going on right around us. I think most writers take inspiration from daily life and from news events. I try not to be too trendy, but on the other hand I feel that if you have a really interesting crime then you have the basis for a good story, and if you have an interesting criminal you have a good story.

Dan Barry: I only read science fiction thinking, "What can I use?"

Bob Burden: I read very little. For two reasons: number one, time; number two, to avoid being derivative.

Alfred Bester: Nothing goes to waste, you know. I have a "gimmick book" that's about 400 pages long. And everything is listed in it. You know, people say, "Where do you get your ideas for a story?" What can I say? I've got more ideas than I can write in a lifetime.

Enki Bilal: It occurs to me that if you work out something spontaneously, you get the best results. I never had a methodic approach towards the costumes — I've always been lazy during drawing! I always considered digging through the files a great waste of time. I like my pencil to work instantly on the design and the narration, to build the drawing, and that's why I never bothered myself about garbs. That is how I came to the design, mixing the past, the present and the *possible* future. My costumes are *out of time*.

Brian Bolland: A writer stores up words. He studies and listens to the way that people talk to one another and the way that circumstances come together to make stories, and his head is full of the technique of storytelling. An artist looks at images and stores these images in his mind for the future — but unfortunately, no writer is ever going to tap this reserve of visual images stored in the artist's brain.

John Buscema: I'm very aware of how people move, how people walk, how they sit,

JO DUFFY

how they stand, how they turn their heads. These are the things I love drawing; they are the things that appeal to me.

To me any movement of the figure is action, and I love the dynamics of the figure in motion.

John Byrne: A lot of my best stories have been born because somebody hands me a rule and says don't do this, so the first thing I do is look for the way to do it but still within the rule.

Paul Chadwick: I think Edward Abbey once said "Whether you get an idea by looking at a sunset or by looking into a beehive, it has nothing to do with its value." Another favorite quote of mine is from Victor Papanek: "Ideas are cheap." They are. A rock man — big deal. It's the execution that counts. All the little character details and the sensibility with which the stories are approached; I think that's where the value lies in CONCRETE. It's not in the idea.

Jo Duffy: When I'm riding the train back and forth, my head is working on the story. I used to think I was abnormal; in fact, I'm a typical writer. I'm kind of a Walter Mitty, in that scenarios are always strolling through my head, and it wasn't until I'd been a writer for about a year and a half that I realized, even though these scenarios were about generic people, or Jo-people, I could learn to recognize a phrase that could be appropriate for Luke Cage to say. If, like, I was replaying an argument I just lost, in my mind, I'd suddenly realize this is something that Iron Fist could say to his lawyer, and it would sound so much better than when I said it, and it would pull that story together. So always listening to what I'm saying and listening to what I'm thinking and listening to what other people say, does a lot of my job for me.

Kevin Eastman: I've been very influenced by Rich Corben, Vaughn Bodé, and Kirby. I was influenced by them in the way that they just had such a great, great way to tell a graphic story. They really strived so hard for the different angles, they tried so hard to make the story really interesting. That's inspired me a lot to really try hard to do something different just to try different things, to be really experimental — because you know, the comics world has such a wide range of things that are being done that it's a lot of fun to find a slot somewhere and really go crazy.

Archie Goodwin: Before I did a script I would talk to the artist and ask him what kind of story he wanted to do. A historical period, a type of story, a setting he'd like to work in, anything like that would give me a springboard toward narrowing my own thinking and coming up with something to please us both.

Mike Grell: The stories that I do generally reflect things that are going on in the community that I live in. I take a lot of my subject matter from the headlines and news flashes at eleven, and simply extrapolate them for dramatic purposes. It's not necessary for me to feel personally involved in the story in order for me to be able to write one, but if I find the subject matter interesting or compelling then I certainly will attack it. I relatively rarely get up on a soapbox and try to preach, I don't have any answers — but I've got a ton of questions. And sometimes the best thing you can do to people is get them to ask a question of themselves, or acknowledge that the question exists and try to find the answer for themselves.

Don Heck: When I first started drawing girls I couldn't draw them worth a damn. I always liked the Caniff stuff, you know, Burma, the Dragon Lady, and stuff like that. I always ended up keeping that right next to me at the drawing board. I didn't copy it, but when I would see something that was really pretty, that was what I would try to do. I tried to model from

movie stars like Ava Gardner, who had a pretty good-looking face.

Bane Kerac: I've never typecast myself as an imitator of the great masters of comics. I strive to pull out of chosen ones' works the most useful experiences, to analyze them and create my own solutions. There are many artists who have, for example, the Romita Sr. clear image of his old DAREDEVILs, but without his camera angles and editing/directing; so they're closer to the European style and spirit.

Jack Kirby: Joe Simon and I would be together to talk over stories and illustrations and we would walk the New York streets, walk by open-air newsstands. I don't know how many there are left, but the newsstands always used to be out in the open. And there, hanging on the newsstands, were love magazines, and we would pass by these magazines every day, you know, and give them no notice whatsoever, because we were so busy talking about adventure stories.

Suddenly there I was one day, the magazines were hanging out of the newsstands, and we had to stop for traffic, so we began to look about us, and there it was staring us right in the face. "Love, love, love!" And Joe and I suddenly realized that there were no love magazines in the field. We created YOUNG ROMANCE, MY OWN ROMANCE, MY DATE —

It developed into deeper stuff, but certainly it was real, because it dealt with real people, with families, and we were as discreet with the subjects as we could be.

Alex Kotzky: Will Eisner would see a Hitchcock movie on Saturday night — this is when we were working on THE SPIRIT supplement, eight pages — and he would incorporate in THE SPIRIT all of the lighting effects that Hitchcock had done.

Todd McFarlane: The less stuff that I actually look at that's comparable to the type of work that I'm doing, the better it is because then I don't have any preconceived notions about it.

Angus McKie: The only way you can get work done is to be like a medieval monk. You lock the doors and almost cease to exist as a person, and you move into a private world, creating things. People only get to see the drawings you push out under the door. When you come out again, you talk to people, you get ideas, you read newspapers, you watch television. In other words, you see what's going on and then you go back into your box and create. You have to be a bit of a recluse to get work done — but a well-informed recluse.

Alan Moore: I don't subscribe to the "precious" attitude toward art, where you sit and wait for the Muse to settle on your brow. You can't just wait for an inspiration — not when you're doing it for a living. Van Gogh did, and he ended up penniless in a looney bin. If you wait for the Muse to fly in your window, you'll wait for weeks — and she'll be off down the road screwing around with some 15-year-old kid who's just written his first poem about the evils of modern warfare! You've got to develop a mechanical approach, think about what you're doing, and experiment.

Tom Orzechowski: I've got a nice thing called ALPHABETS: OLD AND NEW from 1902 and all kinds of books with titles like MODERN LETTERING and LETTERING OF TODAY from the '30s, and three or four very nice brush-lettering books from the '20s. I try to keep myself open to all the sources possible because that gives you a real variety in the look. I'm trying to work more towards the styles of paperbacks or pulp magazines than I am towards the purist styles of comic books.

George Pérez: I like watching other people, seeing them in the movies, silent films, sound films, television, interacting with each other. I pay attention to that, and I try to imbue the characters with a little bit of life. In some cases, it's a lot tougher because the characters are so set in their body patterns — there are certain ways this character will stand, there are certain ways that character will walk. It's like breathing life into a statue. Or dubbing a foreign film. It gives me a challenge. The patriotic stance of Captain America, the slight swagger in Hawkeye's walk, or the mysteriousness of the Vision, the body and almost exotic allure of the Scarlet Witch and the much more girl-next-door youthful fun-loving attitude of Jan Van Dyne, the Wasp. Those are the types of things you latch onto, and I have a great time just having people criss-crossing together.

Richard Pini: ELFQUEST, its characters and its world, are based very firmly in the reality of our lives and of this world. Any fantasy worth its salt has a basis in the reality lived by the creators of that fantasy. Treating it as something totally separate from our world is absolutely 180 degrees out of phase with what ELFQUEST is meant to be.

GENE COLAN & some of the characters he's done

Gene Colan: I'll do a lot of things that may have nothing to do with comics. For instance I have my students draw to music. I do that because it's stimulating; it works up the imagination. I do that myself and I figure what helps me will help them. You'd be surprised at the high that you get from music.

P. Craig Russell: I think you'll find that most comic artists are heavy music listeners no matter what style of music they like. Usually, it's rock. I'm sure the response of the rock fans to rock music is just as intense as mine to opera, although I think opera has a little more to say to a comics artist, because it's dealing directly with what we're doing — conveying very big emotions in a hybrid form . . . in our case, words and pictures.

Julius Schwartz: Gardner Fox would come in about 9:15 and around 11:45 we had everything solved but maybe an escape from the trap. We went out to lunch and we came back, and the problem was solved. None of us thought about it; our subconscious worked on it. Our minds kept working all of the time, even when we were eating.

Marc Silvestri: In a schedule crunch you really don't have time to dig through all kinds of photo reference and all of that stuff, and a lot of times you come up with your best stuff in a pressure situation like that. It's real loose and it comes straight from the heart; there's no time to think about what might suck — what comes out is that pure drawing ability that you have.

Dave Sim: I still find interviews in THE COMICS JOURNAL with different guys inspiring, helping me to clarify my own opinions, seeing how they answer their questions, seeing a range of their work interspersed around it.

Dan Slott: My childhood is my greatest draw for ideas for REN & STIMPY. Most of the ideas just come out. I can't explain the creative process. When I draw a blank I just draw on all of the stupid things I did in my childhood.

I'm ripping out my childhood and it hurts whenever Nickelodeon rejects my childhood.

Brian Stelfreeze: I've met a lot of really talented guys in the industry and I'll always trade off with them. I tell them how I'm doing stuff and they tell me how they're doing stuff. The industry, once you get in, it's easy to get better, because you meet a lot of people who are damn good.

Len Wein: I draw my inspiration from three places: the media, my personal experience, and the need to get a paycheck every couple weeks.

Style Shapes Substance

John Byrne: Speech idioms are not really that tough. Most people in comic books talk in a kind of shorthand anyway. Banshee has always been obviously Irish because he says "Boyo" and things like that.

Gene Colan: I try to let the students go with what they've got. In fact I don't even insist that they draw realistically. If they want to be cartoonists, then they have to be cartoonists, be the best cartoonists they know how to be. I won't insist that they draw in any special way, or copy any special style. I just want to bring the best out in each of them, and that way they'll do the best.

Peter David: When a writer is writing a character — particularly one that is so intensely personal as Wolverine is, I think, for Chris Claremont — when you write the character, you hear your own voice speaking the words. When I write the Hulk, I hear my voice except it's speaking with the Hulk's intonation.

When Chris is reading Wolverine as I've written him, he doesn't hear that voice because he

didn't write those words. He tries to put his own voice to it and it doesn't sound right because the words didn't come from him. Therefore, the character doesn't sound correct. That's commonplace. It's exactly the way I react when I see the Hulk written by someone else. My feeling is that the surface may be there, but the nuances aren't there.

Jerry De Fuccio: These young cartoonists think you have to put a carnation in a button hole; they don't leave a square inch open. That isn't the concept of comic books. The concept was that the drawn figure was to be a chalice for color. When C.C. Beck did his Captain Marvel it was almost coloring-book outline stuff. The color was what held the entire thing together. That was the idea behind doing comic books. Nowadays they not only cover up the covers but also the interior artwork.

Jo Duffy: I love cartoony, stylized, extremely energetic art.

Frank Frazetta: You see the variety of styles that I have, from the funny animals to the silly little cartoons to the heavy stuff to the light and silly. The style, the paint technique, is irrelevant. There's no one style of paint application. That's silly. I mean, Howard Pyle and any number of illustrators apply paint in their own way and it's magnificent. It's not the style or the way you apply the paint. It's what you say. It's the statement you make with the art.

Frank Miller: "Realistic" is a word that always gives me a lot of trouble. What's realistic? Geof Darrow's work is cartooned, it's very detailed, it's very absurd. People will regard it as realistic. Cloth falls like cloth and people are the same height as people.

Peter B. Gillis: Most of the people who were and are really good who drew adventure comics *cartooned*. They exaggerated; they simplified. It had to be combined with a certain completeness and subtlety. And it worked.

Kelley Jones: I approach everything in that it may be exaggerated, but a lot of technical stuff still applies. You still have the dead-weight, you still have the texture, you still have to keep the contrast working, the blacks into the white, etc.

Jim Lee: I don't see comics, and really most art, as an attempt to replicate what we see in the outside world. There's really no need to do that because we have photographs. And even photographs are an abstraction of reality. There's no point in drawing something that looks totally realistic and I would point out that even the "realistic" artists like Neal Adams are taking quite a few liberties.

William Messner-Loebs: I think you tend to find your own level of realism that you're comfortable with. I know that when I was starting out to draw very realistically I couldn't make it all come together for me. I couldn't make the backgrounds and the figures and the heads all look right together. When I decided to go a little more cartooney then suddenly everything snapped into place.

Frank Miller: It seems that as comic books have gotten more and more into adventure, emphasizing the hero versus villain conflict, they've lost a lot of what makes cartooning work — we've lost a lot of the texture and character that you find in old cartoons. Some of the old comics artists, like Jack Kirby, did terrific caricatures. That's an essential part of why his work worked.

Ken Selig: The look that's prevalent in comics today is a highly illustrative one — and not good illustration, either, although the technical ability of these men I'm astounded by — these guys can run rings around me — but quite frankly I've always been in great respect of imperfection. I *like* imperfection! It makes something seem human. That's what comics seemed like back when I grew up with them. Comics had a human feel to them! They were crudely done, but by virtue of that crudeness that cartoonist had to put something very extra-special into his work and that was usually in the area of conviction, sincerity.

Val Mayerik: In comics there's a point of diminishing returns, where you keep trying to render and render with pen-and-ink lines, you cross-hatch and cross-hatch, until pretty soon you burn out, and everything's muddied up.

Frank Miller: Should I do, say, an ancient battle story, I'll develop a look for it that will make that story as dramatic as possible, the same way as if one were filming a movie, one would adjust one's pace and style to the difference between doing an epic or a melodrama.

Ken Mitchroney: Jim Davis — who you *never* hear of, who did the FOX AND CROW books — every pose is just *priceless*. You look at the arcs and the angles and the *power* of the drawing, it sums it up in so few lines.

That's what we're trying to do with the Archie TURTLES book. You don't need to shade

and, you know, really McFarlane it up. It works for him, but what I'm doing you need to have a good, clean line and just try to get that point across very quickly.

David Mazzucchelli: The key is to get it all there, but to do it as simple as possible. Comics is basically a short-hand vision of what we call the real world. It works best when the drawn line is creating a reality that is very pure and simple.

George Roussos: The artist I like best is Chester Gould. His work on DICK TRACY is simple, almost like blueprints. Yet he could do anything within its guidelines. It had intensity, and an understanding of the comics medium. It's always the people who have no understanding who become over-complicated. When you have a lot of technique, you have no substance. It's usually a disguise for something. You find artists with slick drawings who have nothing to say.

Ken Selig: A cartoonist wants to simplify it! That's essentially what a good cartoonist is doing! He doesn't want to put in one extra line unless it's really needed — if he's a *good* cartoonist! That [redacted] you got here in your books now . . . dammit, if I could just tell those kids! You're losing the entire quality of what good creative ability has been since time immemorial. Simplicity! Don't put in the line if it's not needed.

Chic Stone: Most artwork today is over-embellished and over-complicated. I notice today as I read the stories that I get lost in trying to figure out the artwork.

Charles M. Schulz: There was an old-time cartoonist, Frank Wing, and he was of the school where everything should be drawn quite accurately. I used to listen to him telling students, "Draw from life. Draw from life." He always emphasized draw from life. "Take a shoe and place it across the room from yourself and draw it from different angles. Draw the wrinkles in people's clothing." From that you can later exaggerate in your drawing.

Bill Sienkiewicz: Part of what art is is the essence, the quintessential essence, distillation; it's knowing as much what to leave out as what to put in.

Walt Simonson: Hey boys and girls, it's not a photograph! It's an incredible simulation, it's a drawing. You can leave something out if you can't figure it out. A time-honored solution.

Jim Starlin: Anatomy is not absolutely essential. Some of the best people in this business fake their anatomy — Jack Kirby, for instance. It's all slashes. One of the best artists in the business right now is Bernie Wrightson — who really doesn't know where anything goes, but he slaps it together so well that it looks right, you know? I mean, Bernie himself will admit that he's faking it. Yet it looks right. I mean, I *believe* Hannover Fist, but if you went and tried to connect anything up on Hannover Fist, you'd realize his skin has all sorts of things stuck underneath it, like apples and old cans and bottles — he couldn't move, the way he looks. The person who's got the best feel for anatomy in this business is probably John Buscema. He thoroughly incorporates anatomy into his work, but it doesn't enslave him. If he's got to hedge on the anatomy to get a composition to work, he'll do it in such a way that it's believable.

I've talked to other folks who come from a certain school of thought — who believe anatomy is everything and who will sacrifice composition and storytelling for it. These are comic books — this is supposed to be a combination of storytelling and art.

Brian Stelfreeze: There are two main schools in comics: the organic guys and the machinists. I'm considered one of the machinists because of my graphic approach to drawings.

For a long time when I started I couldn't put it together. Whether I was trying to draw the human form or *anything* — apples or oranges — I could not do it. It wasn't until I saw a TV program on computers and vector graphics, where I sat back and really paid attention to it, and suddenly I was like, "Wait a minute — yeah!" You don't necessarily have to take such an organic approach to doing the human form. And when I looked at the human form not so much as a, you know, a bag of water, but when I looked at it as a machine, that's when things started making sense to me.

Arthur Suydam: There are a lot of people who can draw real well, but somehow they turn out a technically good-looking product that has an absence of life. I felt that Graham Ingels was the greatest example of somebody who did not draw things in proportion, yet when you looked at it, it looked right. There was a good lesson in that — not to get too sterile-looking.

Martin Wagner: Early on, when I was still young and new at it and trying to make my rendering look really *complex* and interesting, I would over-render on occasion. It takes just practice to get that to the point where you're

really doing something that can *be* as complex as you want it to be, or as *not* complex as you want it to be, while it's still all very clean and neat.

Jim Starlin: I really think that cartooning is such a hard thing to get right, mostly because it's a collaboration among people who have gigantic egos, each of whom is really hard-pressed to sacrifice anything of his own to make the rest of the job work. That's why I find working by myself is so easy — because I *have* to sacrifice. I have no choice.

The Philosophy of Comics — And Life

Gerry Conway: There are people who are years younger than me, and I feel furious when I think where they are in their careers and where I am in mine. But you can't live like that, always playing catch-up with someone else. You gotta be happy where you are. Steven Spielberg is only two years older than me. Now, how am I supposed to live with that?

Peter David: When I come on a book, my attitude is not to come in with a bunch of large-scale plots — Kree-Skrull wars, time-travel, tying up outstanding plotlines that have been hanging around for 15 years. I feel there's nothing unique to the book if you come up with a generic plot and just plug in these characters.

I try to get a feeling for the characters and work from within, try to develop stories that would be the most interesting and involving for these characters.

J.M. DeMatteis: I think we all have to challenge ourselves. You can't become complacent.

Arnold Drake: In comics — at least, this is the way I work — it starts with an effect. You're looking for a picture. And once you've got that, you're looking for a rationalization. How did it come about? How did this thing get this shape or this power? And then you get yourself involved in the origin. And my thing was always to try to get as human a story as I could, and as realistic as I could.

Steve Englehart: I don't sit down with an overriding philosophy other than to come up with a good story.

Neil Gaiman: I was bewailing the quality of comics in the comics stores, and bewailing the comics stores, bewailing various things, and there was a pause in the conversation, and Dave Sim said in his inimitable and lovable way, "So what are you doing about it?" And I thought about it a little bit and eventually I said, "Well, I'm writing good comics. I mean, that's the only thing . . . It's all you can do, is you keep writing good comics, and you hope that maybe it'll change something."

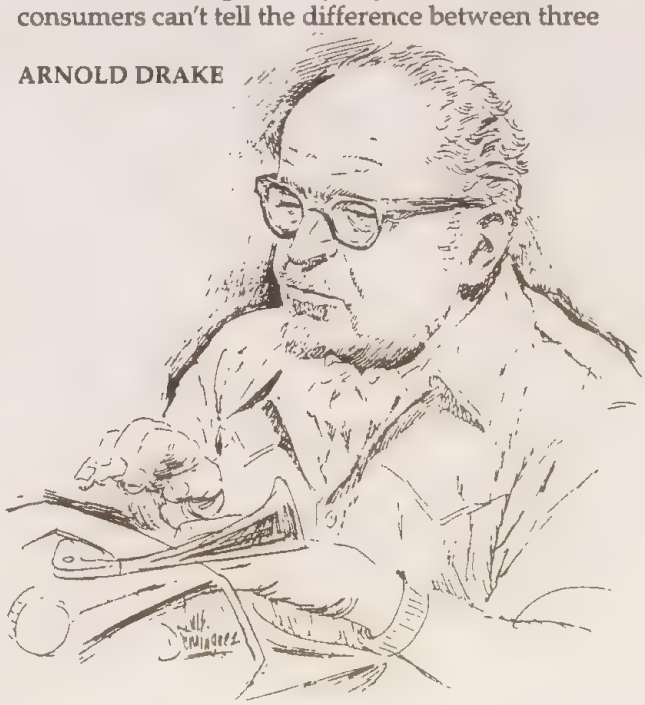
Dick Giordano: You can't sit still. You're either getting better or you are getting worse. If you don't practice your craft and approach it intelligently, you are going to start getting worse.

Alan Grant: If I like what I've written, I don't care if anybody else likes it or not — although it gives me great joy if people send me letters saying that a particular story made them cry, for instance. I really like getting letters from people who say that my stories made them cry.

Ann DeLarrye-Gold: There's one fundamental rule: this is free advice so take it as a nugget of gold — you have to enjoy what you're doing. That can't be faked. After that it's all technique and polish.

Larry Hama: I think the key is being into it and liking it and believing in it, more so than any amount of technical expertise or chops or what-have-you. There are people around who can draw incredibly well. They are incredible draftsmen. They're not necessarily the most popular storytellers or artists, and a lot of guys who are very popular are not really very technically proficient as draftsmen. They're just incredibly sincere and into the stories they tell. That's the bottom line.

I think the great majority of the actual consumers can't tell the difference between three



ARNOLD DRAKE

given artists. What they can sense is whether or not somebody is into it. When somebody is *really into it* then you're willing to completely overlook any flaws in proportion, or rendering, or stiffness, or what-have-you, because they're delivering the goods. The Tinkerbell Syndrome is what you call it. If you stop believing in Tinkerbell, then she dies. That's why you can't really judge comic books by any sort of yardstick that takes into consideration the finesse in the artwork or the wonderful structure of the words or whatever. It's the impact of the whole, put together as an entertainment.

Kelley Jones: The reason I do the stuff I do is that I clearly enjoy doing what I'm doing.

Jim Mooney: "Dial H for Hero" wasn't a strip I particularly enjoyed, and I think the quality of the work kind of reflected that. All through my career, whenever I haven't really enjoyed something too much it *showed.*

Mike Kazaleh: I don't come up first with a technique and then figure how to use it. I work and I put it in. If I think it's funny, I'll use it.

Animation is a more labor-intensive operation than comics production — more individuals work on any given piece; and therefore, the vision of each will be more diluted in the final product. Usually, the final say is had by businessmen, motivated only by the bottom line, but ***John Kricfalusi*** *reminds us that this needn't always be the case:*

Spumco is the only Hollywood cartoon studio that is actually run by and for cartoonists. They not only *drew* the cartoons, they also *wrote and directed* them. Spumco brought back the production system that produced the classic American cartoons of the 1930s to the 1950s. This was a complete innovation for a modern studio.

Jim Lee: First and foremost, I think you have to please yourself. You can't draw something you're happy with if you're just hacking it out and then saying, "Well, I'm done." My feeling is that if I'm going to sit eight to ten hours on a chair drawing buttons on shirts and high-tech machinery, I better enjoy doing it . . . What I'm here to do is tell a story in a dramatic and interesting way. And a good part of determining how well you're entertaining your audience is by sales. That's one way to gauge the popularity of the book although it's not the only way. You can still have a very popular comic that doesn't sell well although it has a very die-hard cult following. I like to think that we reach a lot of different groups. I'd be lying if I said I wasn't interested in what other professionals thought of my work. These are people that I not only respect but also admire and it gives me a big charge when someone comes up to me and tells me what they like about my work. That's always gratifying.

Alan Moore: The only thing that is a constant throughout my work is that I *have* to be interested in what I'm writing. I have to be excited about what I'm writing, or it will just never communicate to the reader. So I try to sort of crank myself up to a certain level of intensity with each story I'm writing, just purely to maintain my own interest for as long as it takes to write the story.

Denny O'Neil: As a writer, I try and change my act every so often. My advice to any writer who's been doing the same kind of work for over 20 years is, every so often throw out 30% of your bag of tricks. Try to make it hard for yourself. If you've written as many scripts as I have, it's not impossible to go on automatic pilot. I think I know every trick there is. But that will be a kind of controlled boredom if I do that. In some mysterious, alchemical way, my boredom inevitably translates itself to the readers. So if it's hard, I may be frustrated and angry, but I won't be bored.

Tom Orzechowski: The way I look at it, each thing on the page counts as a unit of information, be it copy or a clenched fist, so you place the copy in a spot where, as information, it doesn't conflict with the clenched fist or the crowd scene or other units of information.

Marty Pasko: I have never had any illusion about being an artist, and I've never been a self-conscious artist, in the sense that I sat down at the typewriter to write a comic book and said, "I am now going to create Art." I don't think art is arrived at that way.

Wendy Pini: I wouldn't trade what I've learned, what I've been through — the ups and downs, all the flak that I've had to take from all sorts of different sources that I didn't even imagine existed — I wouldn't trade it for anything. It has made me stronger. It has made me much more of a professional. I am now able to sit back and say to myself, "If people hate it, fine. If they love it, fine." It is one more jump in professionalism for me not to get uptight over what people think.

Steve Rude: One of the blessings in

disguise about this business is how you educate yourself, by taking on things that make you think, that you're not totally familiar with. Sometimes a little boundary stretching is good for us — in fact, it's *always* good for us, even though it can be painful.

Arn Saba: I don't have any idea that comics *should* be anything in particular. Comics should be whatever you want. The challenge is, does it work or not?

Ken Selig: I believe the reason why comics is such a weak sister today is because the audience is dictating what is being printed. I'm a great believer in the fact that if you feel something in the seat of your pants and it's right then you can *make* an audience.

Jim Shooter: I find that any character I'm writing that has anything to write about, that has some conflict, that has some personality to explore, I can really get into it.

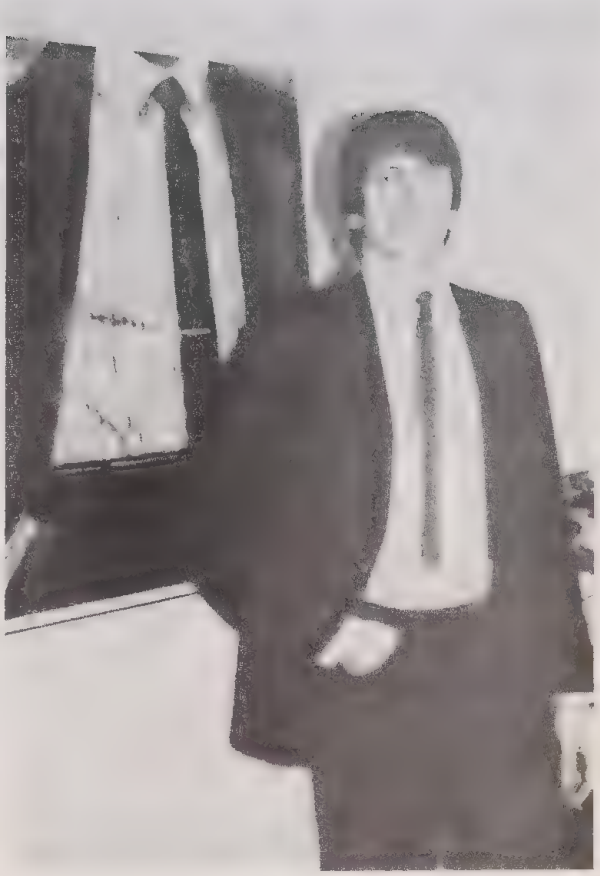
Dave Sim: As Henry David Thoreau said, "Simplify, simplify." If it's simple already, examine it and see what it is that is good, *maintain* that, and see what is bad, and if it's bad, just pass it by.

Walt Simonson: Illustration is really problem solving and your job is really communication. You're given a problem and you try to communicate that as clearly as you can in a single drawing. It's a little different from comics but the communication is the key link.

Jim Starlin: I think it's important to give a positive message — that things *can* be better than they are right now, telling the kid who is reading these stories at fifteen that if he believes hard enough, he can get to wherever he wants to be when he gets older. I was born in Detroit and I wanted to be a cartoonist and everybody thought I was nuts. I remember taking an aptitude test, back in high school. I'd been working in gas stations, so my aptitude test immediately said I should become a mechanic. I had a lot of trouble with teachers who were trying to get me into engineering courses. They thought the idea of drawing comics was a pipe dream — but I believed it.

Brian Stelfreeze: A lot of purists — you know, the people who only like using one medium — they *hate* me because I use everything. For a long time I found that the best white you could use was actually Griffen's shoe polish — until Dr. Martin's came out with something a little better. If I thought oatmeal would give me a good texture, I'd use it on a painting. The most important thing is getting a good piece. I think purists need to maybe get a little more vegetables in their diet.

JIM SHOOTER



Dan Thorsland: There's no such thing as bad writing or art. There's inappropriate or inexperienced writing, but there's not bad writing. You might not want Shakespeare to be writing every issue of THE PUNISHER.

Cat Yronwode: Since the split developed at the end of the 19th century between commercial art and fine art, fine art has become increasingly the plaything of an inbred group of effete intellectual snobs. At one point, "fine art" degenerated into Jackson Pollock dribbles and people wrapping polyester around the landscape, and as far as I'm concerned, that stuff has no rightful place on earth, and that's why comics are better, a more viable form of art. These cheapjack *poseurs*, who talk about "the struggle," and "suffering for the art" while they're melting plasticine over eggs and putting it up in galleries with nails stuck in it, should be taken out behind the barn and shot in the name of art.

Research and Reference

If you don't know what you're drawing or writing about, you have two choices — you can fake it, or you can find out. Think the readers won't know if you fake it? Think again. The following anecdote may seem to be taking this "research" business farther than it really needs to go — but it paid off, as knowing your stuff always pays off, by giving the story an aura of authenticity you just can't get any other way. ***Jerry De Fuccio*** *tells us:*

Harvey Kurtzman and I would get involved with one phase of the research and we'd get so involved that Harvey would remind me that we weren't there to have fun, we were there to do research.

Harvey was such a stickler for accuracy. He would always say never to copy a weapon from someone else's drawing. One day we were doing a Korean War story and he came in with a cast iron replica of a Mauser, a gun that was being used by the Koreans at the time. He told me to get down to the train station and rush it to Wally Wood so that he can draw it into the piece he was working on. I put it in a paper bag and ran down to the train station right at rush hour. As I was standing on the train, holding the strap, the damn thing fell out of the bag and onto the floor. Everybody on the train turned into statues.

Then there was the time I was sent up to New London, Connecticut, to ride on the submarine. The officer of the day said we were going to submerge. I told him my editor never mentioned that and that I was to come up and listen to the AAAAOOOGA, AAAAOOOGA, and all of the bells and klaxons. The officer had me sign a release and I'm signing my life away. It turned out to be a great experience. When we were under the water it was so placid. It was wonderful.

Harvey had told me to call him when I was finished. Instead I sent him a telegram that said, "Many brave hearts are asleep in the deep, glub, glub." When I came back Harvey did the layouts and I wrote the story "Silent Service," which Jack Davis illustrated.

Shel Dorf: Milton Caniff had the reputation of having the most complete clipping file of anybody. The Library of Congress actually came to him for information at one time.

Gaylord Dubois: When I began scripting the TARZAN comics, I read every bit of Edgar Rice Burroughs material I could get hold of. I used names, places and characters mentioned in the novels, while taking care not to plagiarize any of the stories. I used Burroughs' Ape-English glossary, as closely as possible, sometimes having to invent new Ape words in certain situations.

Jo Duffy: John Buscema subscribes to the fashion magazines, and all the sports magazines, and I imagine his entire home is a swipe file. He's *looking* all the time. As a writer, he gave me an understanding of what I ought to be telling the artist I was working with, if I wanted him to draw what I saw in my head. And he gave me an understanding as an editor what I should be looking for in artists' work, and what I should be telling them.

Stan Drake: The problem that an artist has, if he's doing the kind of work that I do, is winding up with a finished product that looks real and has a realistic touch — which is beyond just scribbles and drawing and trying to make somebody look real. The Polaroid camera helped me immeasurably. I buy Polaroid film by the case. For the men, I would sit in a chair in the attitude required by the strip, and then I would have a Polaroid shot, just like that. In less than a minute we'd have this picture of a man sitting in a chair, absolutely perfect, all of the folds in the suit, to be used as a guide. My work took on a look of authority that it needed.

On the other hand, ***Alex Kotzky*** *in a later interview offered this point of view on the above:*

I think the thing that held Stan Drake back, to some extent — even though he is an *excellent* artist — he would use Polaroid almost consistently for figure work. When he transposed it from the Polaroid to the paper, sometimes he didn't change proportions, so you would have the proportions that you would get if you photographed the figure. He animated his stuff but it still looked like it was taken from the camera to some extent.

George Pérez: At the time when I did three-and-a-half books a month, I was a lot faster, hungrier perhaps, and I didn't do the research for real detail that I do today. I would fill in backgrounds with lines and shapes . . . if it was a building put in a few vertical and horizontal lines — you've got a building. Now I try to make the building look like real buildings. I use photo references — if a scene takes place in New York, I try to use real places in New York. In WONDER WOMAN, once we said she was based in Boston,

I couldn't make it just an anonymous city — it had to be Boston or else why put it there? That kind of dedication to research and reference has made my work more complex, more real — and a hell of a lot slower.

Wendy Pini: Frankly, I am a little bit embarrassed to admit this, but I am sort of like Al Capp, who once described himself as a man with opinions on everything, but an expert on nothing. I really have not done what you could consider "hard" research into tribal societies. I really have a very catch-as-catch-can knowledge of different types of customs and mores and so forth, but having retained all of these different things in my memory, and having more-or-less correlated them, and having found similarities between many tribal structures throughout the world, I have infused the different tribes of ELFQUEST with different aspects of all that I have absorbed over the years.

I don't think the tribal societies that we have created in ELFQUEST bear any comparisons to factual tribal society. But ELFQUEST feels tribal without necessarily reflecting any particular tribal culture.

Don Rosa: The thing that was the most fun about THE PERTWILLABY PAPERS was the research. I decided to take a hint from the Old Master — Carl Barks — and go for authenticity.

John Romita Jr.: For the X-MEN issue which was set in Tokyo, I spent about six hours in the library, doing research on Tokyo's skyline, old Tokyo, new Tokyo, Japan's armed forces, and so on. I like to do it that way, because I don't like to go into a book having to cheat or fake anything.

Steve Rude: I studied Kirby *extensively* before I took on MR. MIRACLE, and I really felt I understood the essence of what his style had. I broke it down into the human body in an extreme gesture with a bunch of black accent lines to indicate movement and form, so that's what I tried to do. I did feel I understood the essence of what made his style so dynamic. I didn't try to copy every little squiggle he put in, which is ridiculous.

P. Craig Russell: It gets expensive to do all the drawing from life. First, I work out thumbnail sketches with stick figures, so I know exactly what I want. Then, I bring in a model. A lot of the poses, such as flying and jumping and falling down and so forth, a person couldn't possibly hold for more than thirty seconds. I take photos for those, and use them for later reference.

Stan Sakai: The person who *really* pushed me into doing a lot of research was Sergio Aragones. For GROO, Sergio does an immense amount of research. If he has to draw a ship — that Groo sinks, of course — Sergio will go to the library and look up different research books on ships and he'll go home and make up his own design and it'll be accurate from different points of view. He'll learn everything there is to know about ships before he actually draws one. He encouraged me to do my research on USAGI, so I've got a lot of books on Japanese history, folklore, the samurai class, war tactics, folk houses and country life. I've accumulated quite an amount of research because of him.

Walt Simonson: There's a problem with getting a decent reference. This is true for any company when you're working with a character you're unfamiliar with. It's especially critical on covers. What happens is you start twisting characters around on covers and then you realize all of your references are from the front. That kind of thing happens to everybody. Either you make it up if you can or you ask for better references.

Tod Smith: I saw that Gil Kane used bodybuilding books — PUMPING IRON stuff — for additional reference — although he knows anatomy inside-out. So I thought, "If he can do it, I can do it," and practiced drawing from bodybuilding books.

The Art of Swiping (or: The Swiping of Art)

As prominent as it is in the creation of comics, this rates a separate subhead. But sometimes it was hard to figure out whether a particular tip refers to "swiping" or "reference".

John Dixon: Sometimes an idea will pop into your head which you *think* is an original idea but it's not necessarily an original idea. It can come out of your subconscious and it can be something that happened years ago or something you saw years ago — and sometimes there are cases of plagiarism where it's not *deliberate* plagiarism, just totally subconscious.

Jo Duffy: You can never catch John Buscema swiping — but you can spot lots of artists swiping Buscema. Here's a man who never looks at other comic-book artists except in admiration or for reference. When he wants to figure out

how to draw something, he finds the real thing or a good photo that hasn't been used before.

Jack Jackson: A lot of my panels were stolen or lifted directly from existing work of other artists. I cheat a lot, as do most other artists. Sometimes this "swipe file" is deftly concealed, or the sources are too esoteric to be noticed, but I'll wager that most "great" artists do it at one time or another — from Frazetta right down to the lowliest. Not that it's anything to brag about, but it happens all the time and I figure you might as well be honest about it.

The trained eye will be able to pick a lot of Charles Russell, Frederic Remington, etc., out of COMANCHE MOON and LOS TEJANOS. After all, there ain't that many buffalo or wild Indians running around anymore to draw from life. I figure that if you're going to swipe, might as well do it from the best, and I usually leave enough of my source intact so that there'll be no question about it. This sort of thing has been going on since the caveman paintings. It ain't new.

On the other hand, **Frank Frazetta** makes the following claim:

You know, I've never really swiped that I could think of, and if I have, it was so minuscule it's ridiculous. And I pride myself on that, because that's the whole joy. I can't, frankly, look at any of my artwork if I know that I've lifted it. I'd just never get the same joy out of it, and I can't pretend to sit there in pride and watch people admiring it and saying, "Wow, how did he think of that one?" if in fact someone else did it first.

Val Semeiks: I don't use comics very much for reference. I use real photographic reference and other material. Comics themselves can be a problem. If you rely on current published material your work starts to look derivative.

Censorship, Artistic Freedom, and Going Too Far

Censors never call themselves censors — they call themselves protectors of youth or somesuch. Of course, youth ought to be protected from this and that, but is the stuff kids absorb as entertainment really to blame when they go astray? I remember years ago, eating fried chicken with a friend. My friend observed, "Y'know, Wertham was right. Here we are, a couple of guys who read EC comics as kids, and what are we doing now? Tearing birds apart with our teeth."

Dick Ayers provides us with a little historical perspective on the protection of youth:

They blamed us for all the juvenile delinquency, as they phrased it in those days. Now they blame it on dope or something.

Berke Breathed: The power that I or any other cartoonist has to shoot off his mouth must be wielded with a great deal of care and concern. And learning how to harness it and rein it in and let it go at just the appropriate time is a difficult thing and often takes a considerable amount of experience — which most of us, since we're only working one cartoon a day, take some bit of time to accumulate.

Tad Pietrzykowski: DARK NEBULA comes from the gut, and my gut instinct says if someone drops a brick on your foot and you're in pain you're going to say [redacted]

John Byrne: It's no trick to put the stuff in. The trick is keeping the stuff out. It takes much more thought and imagination to tell a "realistic" story — as one example — without having anybody ever say "[redacted]

Bob Burden: The medium I work in determines what I do. If I were doing undergrounds or smut I would be writing something different. Basically, I do not touch on sex or racism or politics or religion, because it can hurt someone's feelings. It's not a matter of me having guts or being risque. It's a matter of good taste.

Dick Giordano: Almost all of the things that people complain about — that includes explicit sex, explicit violence, nudity and strong language — I have no objections to their being used in the proper context. I have objections to them being used gratuitously in *any* context. But in terms of them being used in plot or character development, if sex or nudity or violence or strong language is needed to tell the story properly, it shall be used.

DICK GIORDANO

Keith Giffen: Violence should be distasteful. I don't want people coming away from a fight scene saying, "What a great fight scene." I want them to feel a little bit uneasy. Something happened that wasn't very nice.

Jack Jackson: Historical-type sagas like I've been delving into require a measure of self-censorship. This grates on my nerves sometimes. Only time will tell if it's worth it. The truth is that I want this work to be "accessible" to a wide audience, to give young readers something real to put their teeth into — not so real that high-school librarians swallow hard before putting the book on their shelves.

A lot of elderly, matronly types looked at my depiction of Quanah Parker's mother slashing her naked breasts, and it didn't faze them because they knew that it really happened that way in real life.

The key seems to be artistic *restraint*, not self-censorship or total disregard for people's sensitivity.

Kelley Jones: I don't do sex books or the horror with mad/insane people just walking around. To me, the stuff that scares me is the relation stuff, the day-to-day things.

Sam Kieth: What's the deal with Tim Vigil? Why doesn't he use his great powers for good instead of evil? He has a lot of skill. Why does he draw his women like he does? You think he'd be like a degenerate, but he's really a quiet, thoughtful person. He's very normal. I wouldn't particularly care to do that stuff. I'd fight to the death for his right to do that.

*Here, publisher **Ron Turner** is talking about putting out a line of sexually explicit comics:*

I'm not going to stop what I'm doing. At the same time, I don't think it's a good idea to wave a red flag in Ed Meese's face, you know, and say "I dare ya."

Jack Jackson: The "underground" label has never bothered me. What has bothered me is that great illustrators of the past did not have the degree of artistic freedom that I would have liked them to have. This freedom we must guard and protect, regardless of the labels placed on them, because they go to the core of creativity.

*Of course, the fact that a person opposes censorship doesn't mean he isn't entitled to disapprove of things. **Sam Kieth** offers the following:*

The mother of my cousin's son has strongly religious beliefs. I sat her down and gave her copies of various Marvel and DC comics. We talked about these books. I showed her that you have to go through the books and make sure there isn't anybody being hacked up or anything. I don't know how much of that sank in. I think it comes down to where you have to decide what's suitable. It's important that parents sit down with their kids, just like they should do with movies or anything else.

Jack Kirby: I, personally, wouldn't like to take a horror theme to excessive lengths. I wouldn't like to define the horror wound by wound, or drop by drop of somebody's blood, as they do today. They've got to be very graphic with it. I don't like that kind of approach. My approach is that the human imagination is good enough to define all that by itself. I can do a story about Dracula, without showing Dracula actually puncturing some guy's neck.

Jim Mooney: Some of the stuff they're putting out today bothers me. I just don't care for the splatter school, sadism — I defend their right to do it, but I also defend my right not to read it!

Alan Moore: The Comics Code doesn't like a lot of sex and a lot of violence. But if you don't fixate on sex or violence, that leaves you with a lot of room to do things.

Denny O'Neil: You have complete freedom if you are going to write a short story, but then you take your chances that anybody will ever read it.

Roger Slifer: I think it's important we portray a realistic view of violence. I feel philosophically that if you're going to portray violence you should do it with a purpose.

Timothy Truman: You remember the scene in PHANTASM, that great old Saturday matinee movie from a few years ago? With the little silver balls that whiz down the corridors and land on people's heads and this little screw would come out and screw into the people's heads and blood would gush out the back of the ball? Well, the original print of that had blood only squirting out for five or ten seconds, and it was real strong. You were really horrified. In the final cut they extended the squirting blood for what seems like at least half an hour. It became sort of comedic.

Jim Valentino: I think it's up to each individual parent to decide what their child should or should not read. I think that's something nobody else has the right to decide except those parents. The stuff is out there. I think conscientious parents who know what their children are reading will make those decisions.

The Inker

Of all the specialties in the production of commercial comics, only the inker is given a special heading here. The inking specialty is perhaps unique to our industry. Writers, illustrators, letterers and colorists all have counterparts elsewhere, but only in comics does a separate person render the pencilled drawings of another into camera-ready form — while at the same time putting his own unique stamp on the final product.

Another reason for inking to have its own heading is because it's not very well understood, even by many people who have followed comics for years — in fact, even by some who have broken in and are already a part of the industry.

Murphy Anderson: To be honest with you, inking is not as satisfying as doing your own work. But still, it was a way to make more money and with a family and a mortgage it was important. Inking was more readily available than complete assignments and, for me at least, was more lucrative.

Dick Giordano: I don't prefer one over the other, pencilling or inking, but I do need to recharge my battery by doing a pencilling job once in a while. It leads you to new insights as an inker.

Vince Fago: My assistant did pencils for me for ten years when I was doing Peter Rabbit. The inking really sets the tone for the way the final artwork looks. I always felt that the inker had the biggest influence over the finished product. Richard Rockwell, who is Norman Rockwell's nephew, *pencilled* all of Milton Caniff's strips. I don't know how many people knew that. The reason I mention it is as a good example of how much the inker influences the product. The inker has final control of how the product looks.

Joe Rubinstein: A comic-book inker has to be an artist, a man or a woman who knows how to draw. You can't be given a John Buscema drawing, which is beautifully executed, and not understand anatomy and movement and all those other things to pull it off. There are people in the industry who are tracers, who literally just follow what they do. It's as if you're taking dancing lessons, and they put those numbered footsteps down — one, to the next, two, to the next — yeah, you'll hit the right spots. But it's not like Fred Astaire in an easy movement.

Sal Buscema: A good inker has to be a good draftsman, and that's why he's such a good inker — because he can draw. Any inker that inks well over someone else's pencils does so because he himself knows how to draw.

Dick Giordano: My philosophy of inking is that the work is done in your head before you sit down to a drawing board. The actual planning of what you are going to do is more important than the actual doing of it, which is monkey work. If you've got a brush in your hand and you do this for ten years, you get better at it. But that isn't inking. Inking is the thinking in your head.

Frank Miller: I'm changing my art style to accommodate better printing. I've found that when the paper is white, most of what comic-book inking is no longer works. The heavy blacks and the bold outlines produce too slick a look for good paper. The style of inking that we do in comics now is designed to compensate for bad printing. And as the printing gets better, we have to change our whole approach to rendering, so that we're playing against the quality of the printing rather than trying to bring it up. We have to soften our image, because the resolution is so fine.

John Romita: I would always prefer to pencil and ink my own stuff, but I never had time to do that. So the next thing was to do tight pencils and hope the inker would not change things.

Dick Giordano: I won't use an inker if I don't have to, even though I know a lot of people who are good. For one thing, I like to ink. For another, I think I can do better drawings that way, because I can pencil rather loose. And that gives you a little bit freer looking ink line.

Mike Royer: When I inked somebody I wanted the reader to get the feeling that the penciller had inked himself. I inked a couple of KA-ZARs that Don Heck pencilled and I want to tell you, when I was finished you would have sworn Don Heck inked it!

My goal as an inker is to complement the penciller's work. When you look at the finished product you don't know it's inked by someone else.

Joe Rubinstein: Gene Colan draws in a very tonal way. He does not put a definite line down, he puts sort of a smudge, and you're supposed to interpret it. You can't do that unless you know something about values in light and shade. To be an inker, for all you would-be inkers out there, means you are an artist with ink, just as a penciller is an artist with a pencil. You have

to understand how a shirt folds when you sit down, how a woman's hair bounces when she walks, what an expression does to the facial muscles. Too many people think it's just tracing, and it's not. I hate it when I see beautiful artwork by Alan Weiss, Dave Gibbons, Brian Bolland or whoever given to an incompetent who doesn't understand enough to keep up with it.

P. Craig Russell: Inking is almost like time off to me. It's a real skill, a real craft to develop, but it's not as mentally draining as starting out with a blank page, which is the real challenge.

Marc Silvestri: Tony DeZuniga inked something of mine. He changed everything. It looked a lot *better,* of course, but it was kind of *distressing* to me. My stuff sucked but it was my stuff. But afterwards everybody was coming up and saying, "Hey, that looked pretty good." So I thought, "Maybe this ain't such a bad idea; have somebody *good* inking over me and I get credit."

Walt Simonson: I find that I'm pretty comfortable if I have a tight pencil drawing, because when I'm inking it I'm free to do almost whatever I want to. Most of my finished drawing ends up in the inks, but I have a pretty detailed pencil underneath to guide my inking. I do find that as I go along in the job the early parts of the job have the tightest pencils and the later parts are much looser, simply because as I go along I become more accustomed to drawing it with a pen.

Al Williamson: The only problem I have would be if an artist does not pencil tight something important, like a gun or a car, or doesn't have his perspective lines correct on buildings, you know. If you don't have a good foundation on these things they won't look like what they're supposed to be if I ink 'em the way they are.

Joe Rubinstein: An inker is a storyteller just like the penciller is a storyteller. How to make this glass believable, so that it is sitting on a table that is believable, next to a man and a chair that are believable? If all that works, the story can continue. If the perspective is off, then the viewer stops and is reminded that he is looking at a bunch of pictures.

Andy Mushynsky: I can carry all the tools of my trade in a small pouch. Inking is a very low-overhead line of work.

The Critics

Everybody's a critic — and everybody has *critics. Should a creator ignore them? Get upset over what they say? Learn from them? Here's how some professionals deal with the public reaction to their work . . .*

Mike Carlin: I don't listen to a lot of what the fan press says before a book comes out. I'm more interested in what the reactions are afterwards.

Frank Frazetta: I like some feedback. I used to get it through the mail, but what's better is in person, having conversation and discussing it. And I also learn that way. I pick up a feel about people and what their reaction is, positively, negatively, and I think that's part of the learning process.

Steve Gerber: Today's hot artists are going to be taken by surprise when the fanzines turn against them, as they must, and the sales of their books start dropping, as *they* must, and their clout with editors starts to diminish, as *it* must, eventually. There was a time when people like myself, Steve Englehart, and Don McGregor were accorded the same kind of treatment, when we were the superstars. It doesn't last forever, for anyone.

Archie Goodwin: All audiences aren't equal. You can do a book that will reach a broad spectrum of readers, or you can do a book that will reach a smaller, select audience. You have to realize what kind of book you're doing, and not be disappointed when you do something with limited appeal. You should not be shattered when you find it doesn't sell as well as SPIDER-MAN.

Kelley Jones: When Marvel does a big project, it looks clearly Marvel. When Image does something, it's clearly Image. At DC, it has to look like a DC book and do well financially as well as critically — with critically being the thing for me.

Erik Larsen: Fans really don't know what they're talking about. They don't know anatomy, they don't understand it — when an artist puts every muscle in the human body into one arm or rearranges everything into the classic "sack-of-potatoes" back, they don't realize it. New artists come in and they're recognized for other traits. It doesn't allow the artists to get better — they see a fan favorite and determine to copy the surface gloss. There has to be a point where it's going to backfire.

George Pérez: Let your pride go. The one thing that every artist has to face, I can't think of a single artist who hasn't, is you have to let go of your pride. 'Cause the first thing that you're gonna have to accept is criticism. And it's par for

the course. If these people are paying you for your work, they have a right to criticize you, because they're going to be paying you money. Whatever way you want to learn works for you, do it. But the one emphasis is learn. Don't be afraid to take advice and be smart enough to know when the advice works for you and don't criticize it; don't criticize the critics because they don't like your work.

Don Rosa: One of my advisors told me how he thought the different plot elements of THE PERTWILLABY PAPERS made a fabulous satire on the college financing committee. In order to have a logical reason for Professor Smyte going to the Peruvian jungle, I had him in charge of a particular allotment of funds. That was my only reason — to get him on the trip. It wasn't satire. I learned early on that people will see anything they want to see in my strip — and, I guess, everything else.

Dave Sim: I'm always sort of guessing, trying to think, "Well, how is this going to affect everybody, what is the reaction going to be to this?" I'm almost invariably wrong.

Peter David: I figure the people who like a book read it and recommend it to their friends. The people who are outraged by what I've done, pick it up each month to see how much more outraged they can get. It's easy to find comics that bore you or don't surprise you, but to find comics that royally piss you off is really difficult. Considering how many people complained about Claremont's version of X-MEN, I figured Chris's secret was pissing people off.

Walt Simonson: Any writer of fiction creates a waking dream, and the more effective the dream, the more dreamers you can get to go along with you. Generally, to me, a reader's being upset by events in a book is a sign that you have successfully made someone else into a dreamer, to take part in the waking dream.

Jim Shooter: Stan Lee once told me there are good complaints and bad complaints. If someone comes to you and is upset about some character and wants to know how could you do that to him, and so on — anything about a character — then you did fine. As long as people care about the characters as much as you care about the characters, then you've succeeded. You've communicated.

When people start talking to you about the magnificence of the inker's line, or what clever plot points, or how brilliantly you turned this

DON ROSA

phrase, or how shiny the staples are, it doesn't matter if they love it or hate it. As long as they're talking about the bricks and the mortar, instead of the house, you've lost them.

The Use of Humor: Having Fun With Comics

"Grim 'n' gritty" is such a commonly-heard phrase in today's comics industry that it's almost a single word — and yet, there are those who consider the word "comics" self-explanatory. As you read the following section, be thinking — just what do you want out of a career in comics?

Kyle Baker: A lot of big companies deal almost exclusively with people who have wanted to work for them since birth. The problem with that is the companies don't have to treat you with any kind of respect or pay you.

I only do comics because it's fun, because there's more money in other areas of art. Basically, I now work for whatever company will let me have the most fun.

Mike Baron: Comics is a wonderful medium to make you laugh. Even in the most gut-wrenching adventure there are causes for humor, and only a fool would ignore them. If you write a story without any humor there is no point to having it in comics.

Ernie Colón: The interesting thing about stories and humor is that they're very fragile. I could sit here and tell you a story idea and say, "Wouldn't that be funny?" and you'd say, "Yeah, that's funny," but if we had to work on it for three months, it wouldn't be very funny anymore. If you want to maintain that freshness you'd have to work assiduously to maintain it, so that a

person who had never heard the joke would say, "That's great! That's funny!"

Alan Grant: After quite a lot of experience writing for British comics — non-humor stories — I long ago realized that unless a story has some sort of little humorous element in it, I'm very likely to become bored with it very quickly.

Fred Hembeck: There's nothing worse than a funny comic book that isn't funny. It's glaring. You can put out a bad adventure comic and it just seems mediocre. But if you put out a comic that is supposed to be funny and it doesn't make you laugh, it just seems plain bad.

Mike Kazaleh: I draw characters hyper when they should be hyper and not when they shouldn't. They shouldn't be hyper all of the time or it won't be funny!

John Kricfalusi: Personally, I think comic books for the most part *suck* today. They're *boring* and they're *ugly* and they're *serious,* and too, too busy. Everybody's running around with their veins popping out, screaming vigilantes, you know. I can't believe people running around in leotards are taken seriously. *Lighten up!* Come on, let's go back to what comics really are; they're just supposed to be fun. You're not supposed to take them seriously.

Peter Laird: The parody elements in my book aren't really strong. I mean, they're not intense. I don't know if you've read that Harvard Lampoon parody of THE LORD OF THE RINGS — BORED OF THE RINGS. That's like every sentence is dense with parody. I think that only works if you're very, very clever. I personally don't feel clever enough to maintain a consistently wonderful parody all the way through.

I think too many parodies aren't successful because they're so crammed with parody, so intense, like that BORED OF THE RINGS book. I'm not saying that it isn't successful, but it's heavyhanded, just too much parody.

Glenn Lumsden: Humor is such a part of reality. I reckon most people spend maybe eight percent of their day laughing or being happy. To remove all traces of humor from life is being terribly unrealistic. I think it sometimes gets mistaken for realism in America. People think if they do something that's dark and moody, and no one laughs, that somehow it's being realistic.

Todd McFarlane: When we broke away from Marvel I was pretty militant. I wasn't going to work for anybody, no how, no way. Then I had a conversation with Neal Adams. Neal in some respects fought for some of the same things I did. He told me that when he was trying to start his union years ago, he passed up opportunities to do stuff. Forget where the money was going to, forget who he worked for, it would have been creatively kind of cool to do it. He said he passed up some fun projects. I was thinking, "Hmmm. Good working advice."

Frank Miller: Comic-book writers have largely avoided taking their material so seriously that they show what the social consequences of the events in their stories would be. And that particular question is the most fascinating for me.

Mike Richardson: We wanted to put some fun back in comic books.

Al Weiss: When we were kids there was a point when we got "scientific" and we knew that people couldn't breathe on Venus and that the dinosaurs died out at a certain time. Then you go full circle and come back around to where you accept it again at the surrealistic level. "I know this is ridiculous but I'm going to have a good time with it." If you don't have that attitude then you can't enjoy underground comics, you can't enjoy anything in HEAVY METAL. You've gotta be able to let it go a little bit.

Alvin Schwartz: DC executive editor Whitney Ellsworth would come into the office and say, "How long can grown men continue to do this shit?" It becomes easy to see that we grown men managed to handle it by lightening our characters, by introducing elements of whimsy and comedy.

Mark Waid: We're adults now. We know none of this makes any sense, so let's have fun with it.

Al Weiss: You want to do a strip, put as much of your self and your spirit and what you love about comics into it. I have a saying tacked to my drawing board: "Zen Comic Stripping." That's a reminder to have a good time. Sometimes when you get under deadline pressures, you can forget that you're supposed to be enjoying this. If you're not, then you're a slave and an idiot.

Sometimes, the industry itself can get us down. ***Todd McFarlane*** *reminds us not to lose sight of the basics even in bad times:*

No one's laughing in this industry anymore. Nobody wants to have a joke. Nobody wants to smile. Everybody's worried about the glut and diminishing returns. Everybody's such a tight

V. How Do They Do It?

Working Methods of Comics Pros

Kyle Baker: When you do color books with line art, it's hard to get the registration right. Usually, these things are done with a blueline process. Basically, the thing is shot onto two plates; one is the black plate, and one is colored in. But they never get it right. There's always a little shift; the art gets fuzzy.

The other way they've tried is coloring directly on photostats, and that looks bad. There's no way to do line art and color without something looking weird.

So, I thought if I did the color art on a board, and then did the line art on an overlay, there wouldn't be any double line when the plates shifted.

Frank Frazetta: Something has to be lost in the transition. Even when I bring in my originals and work with the printers, you cannot get a hundred and fifty different color hues. They're starting with four, so there's no way you're going to get it.

Dan Barry: Harry Harrison's wife would lock him in his room and nobody could get at him, when he had to work. He absolutely needed it. Frank Frazetta was the same way, needed somebody to make him work.

John Beatty: Mine is a strange process, really. Sometimes I'll start with a brush, and finish with a pen on a particular page or sometimes I'll do outlining with a pen and do rendering with a brush.

Enki Bilal: I choose to always make something new. not to tie myself down with the characters — purely a matter of personal decision. I admit a little of egoism — after all, I want to be completely free, not to have serial obligations to my publisher, but to produce whatever I want or like, to express myself in my way. I always thought and I still think it now: If someone makes something for his fun and pleasure, he's transferring the feeling to readers!

Brian Bolland: There are things that you can do with ink that you can't always foresee in pencil. There are different ways of putting on the line which you can't dictate in the pencil approach that would be essential ingredients in the atmosphere of the story.

Ernie Colón: The work becomes automatic. That can work for you, and it can work against you. It can work against you in the sense that you become repetitive. You take your bag of tricks that you learned earlier on when you were a freshman, and then you repeat that bag of tricks. When you're just twenty-two and you have a set of clever tricks, it's wonderful. When you're thirty-two, or forty-two, or fifty-two, it's not so clever anymore. It's repetitive and boring.

But, in another sense, it's wonderful, that zen experience of doing an action so many times that it becomes a reflex. When you reach that point, that's when you're supposed to do your best work, because you're no longer thinking, "What's rule number one? Do I indent this paragraph? Do I use quotations?" You're free and clear to be creative. If you can take advantage of this zen experience of repetitiveness, then you're really in a creative frame, where it comes out of you automatically, even mechanically. And that's where the sleepy part of your brain comes alive. You look at the page later and think, "How the fuck did I write that? Where did I get that from?"

Alan Moore: If I was just to try the same approach over and over again, I would have given up four or five years ago, because I would have been bored stupid. Obviously, there are certain techniques that I will use repeatedly, but it depends very much upon the story.

Arnold Drake: I tried to make the stories I was writing smack of the period in which they were being written. That probably dates the stories a little, as the years passed, but for the time in which they were written, it made them very much alive.

Neil Gaiman: While I'm working on a big plotline, I have story ideas that I can't use. I put them off until I get to the end of a big storyline when I have no desire to do another big one for quite awhile because they take a lot out of you.

José Luís Garcia Lopez: I assemble the whole scene first, and decide how many panels go on this page, how many go on that page, and so forth. When I have that figured out, I do sketches on tracing paper, the same size as the page will be. I try to think not in terms of individual panels but in whole pages. I want to get

JOSÉ LUÍS GARCIA LOPEZ

something visually exciting on the page while at the same time telling the story. When I get a page layout I like, I finish the sketch a little more, then I use the table with the light and trace the sketches of the panels onto regular paper.

If I am inking it too, then I don't tell so much in the pencils. I leave a lot of things to improvisation and the feeling of the moment in the inking. I believe that's what I lost working so many years with just pencils — the spontaneity that comes through the art, when you ink your own pencils. You are less elaborate with the pencils, and instead do a lot of improvisation with the inks. If, at the moment you are inking, you feel you need a strong line here, or a black there, you just do it. Sometimes it doesn't work, but when it does it looks — how you say? — "spontaneous."

Mike Kazaleh: I do preliminary roughs just so I know what I'm drawing.

Jim Lawrence: In the days when I was doing strips, I always sort of had in the back of my mind that you do three panels. In one of those panels, you show a full shot of the characters, whatever they were doing. Then in one panel, you might go into a closeup. Then you might have another panel that was a long shot that would show the characters, and get into the background as well, and the background there was really your only chance to set your scene. You can't do it nowadays and still have room for balloons. So unless you're doing a strip which is a pantomime strip, it's just not a viable operation. But you see, I don't believe that syndicates had to go along with that. I think they could have put their foot down and insisted.

Stan Lee: A newspaper strip is much, much more difficult than doing a comic book. You've got three panels a day, and in those three panels you cannot have much dialogue because the strips are printed so small in so many papers. The first panel is generally a summing-up panel. The second panel moves your story forward slightly. And the third panel, if you're lucky enough to dream one up, is a cliffhanger. So you can't move the story too quickly, and yet you can't let it just lie there or it gets too dull.

John Cullen Murphy: Hal Foster was comfortable with a very large original. I put it up to him, "Why don't I do it a little smaller?" Probably better reproduction. He said, "Fine, whatever you want to do." Then I reduced it once more later on. The closer you are to reproduction size, the better it's going to be. At least that's what people tell me.

John Prentice: I guess we all do a lot of acting, cartoonists or illustrators. In fact, if you've got a dramatic situation and you want to use somebody as a model, a cartoonist or an illustrator is very good because they lose all their inhibitions. They know what you want from the character. If it's an aggressive and mean guy, they'll be aggressive and mean. If you use a friend, they'll be very stiff, and they don't understand what you want. But if you've *drawn* enough of that stuff yourself, you know what the other guy wants. Now and then when I'd get stuck for a situation, I'd pose for a character in the mirror and have my daughter or somebody shoot the picture. And a guy like Leonard Starr, if you use him for a villain, he can turn into the meanest looking guy you ever saw, right before your eyes.

Jerry Robinson: I introduced Mort Meskin to DC and we became close friends as well as collaborators. It was a great time to experiment. I remember one time Mort and I did one entire story bleeding from white to black as if lit entirely over head — just for the special effect and mood it established.

Everything bleeding down into black . . . just as a challenge. Sometimes we'd just outline everything with a pen and just add brush accents. Other times we'd just ink in all the blacks and leave everything else with only essential lines added. Various things like that, so it added some excitement to the work. But we learned a lot and it gave our work a different look. It also served to keep up our level of interest and excitement about the work. We also experimented with papers and other techniques such as inking on vellum overlays for different brush effects.

STAN SAKAI

Adrienne Roy: All colorists have their own methods. I've tried them all. One is to go through the entire story and put in all the flesh tones. If you do it that way, it's helpful to read the story at the same time — you get your feet wet, try to understand what you can do with the story. And then you go through and put in all the yellows, then all the blues, and so forth.

Another method, which I think I like better, is to do each page one at a time, going from light values to dark, working on each single page in sequence. That way, if you're working with, say, a green room, it stays green — it doesn't change colors. That's important, because the reader identifies with color and space.

George Roussos: The background color is there to emphasize the basic emotion of a situation — I can't force the situation, however. When a cover is passive, I can't do very much with it, except do nice, neat coloring. I also like to unify compositions by creating circles of color, making the eye focus on the important parts of the picture. I work a lot of things in that most people aren't aware of — shapes and abstractions are what give compositions drama. That's instinct with me.

Enki Bilal: When I write the script, I have some characters and situations at the beginning. Later — with no strict plans — I let the story develop on and on by itself. My people have the chance of independent life; the storyline can be changed, depending on characters' behavior.

Stan Sakai: I usually think of a plot, mull it over in my mind — for about a month, maybe — before I set it down to paper. Then I do some thumbnail sketches. I take a sheet of typing paper and divide it into six rectangles and each rectangle would represent a page. I do the layout and write the dialogue on there and then go directly to the finished artwork. The story changes a lot when I'm actually working on it.

Frank Miller: I rewrite and throw out pages all the time.

Charles M. Schulz: I discovered that working at home for me was absolutely impossible. Even when we moved out here to California — we had a large place, 28 acres — I still never worked in the house. I don't know about others, but I just have decided that a man has to get up in the morning and go someplace. I have to work in a pattern.

Bill Sienkiewicz: I never really set out to do anything crazy. It was just simply, "Wouldn't it be fun to try this" or "This seems the best way to do it." But "I'm gonna be intense now!" — it just doesn't wash. You either are or you're not.

Walt Simonson: What I do first is plot out the story completely. I may have ideas for scenes that I may be able to do brilliantly, but first I break down the plot into diagrams — little boxes, one box per page — in which I will write all the stuff that's gonna happen, and pace the story before I do any drawing. Then I will do thumbnails on sheets of paper about the size of typing paper. I'll do one sheet per page, doing little panels and figures. At this point, I will also be writing lines of dialogue in the margin, if any come to me. In some cases I may re-draw some scenes when brilliant lines of dialogue occur to me that I *have* to include and they don't fit. By this time I may be working back and forth — I may have to draw a scene, or I may have to change the plotting to incorporate a new way I want to do the pictures.

Once the thumbnails are done, I will write the story from the thumbnails. Essentially, what I try to do is to keep everything as loose as possible right up to the last moment, to allow for

revisions, new ideas, new inspirations, whatever. It keeps the creative process lively along each step of the way and maintains a high flow of energy. I'll type the script up, give it to my editor so he can approve it, make changes, whatever. Once the script is written I'll blow the thumbnails up on a projector and trace them — tighten everything up, fine-tune the art, maybe change compositions.

Larry Stroman: I usually do the last several pages first. It drives the editor and writer crazy because they never get the pages in proper sequence. With a lot of people it's easy to start drawing and end up at the end of the book. When you work that way you concentrate on drawing what you like, then by the last four or five pages you have to draw a lot of tiny panels because you've disregarded what has happened with the rest of the story. What I do is use the first several pages and then the last several to do those really wild layouts, then focus on the story in between. That way, it doesn't look as if I've rushed the last couple of pages or had to force something into the final pages.

William Van Horn: I do the pencilling, inking, lettering and coloring because it gives me the greatest degree of control over what comes out in print. I personally don't care for the lettering style that they use at Gladstone. It's just not my style. So I'd rather put up with the agony of lettering. As far as the coloring goes — well, that's just kind of fun. It provides a little break in the schedule and again, for the most part it comes out the way I want it.

Matt Wagner: I come up with a general storyline, then I start to thumbnail it out. I do very tiny little breakdowns of the pages — on one sheet of paper I'll draw 24 little rectangles and then write into each rectangle what happens on that page. Then, it's a matter of breaking it down visually.

Cat Yronwode: Admirably, the character development in ZOT! is *all* done through balloons. It's not done through captions, and that, to me, is the sign of someone who is a good scriptwriter. There are very few plays or movies in which a narrator comes on stage and says, "He was thinking deeply of his ex-wife." No, that's not how it's done in theater, and it shouldn't have to be done that way in comics. Scott McCloud's captions are kept to a minimum and I admire that. If I could convince comic-book writers to write 90% in balloons, I would do it.

Tools of the Trade

Can comics be created with a ball-point pen on Twiltone paper? Sure — but if you want professional *results, you have to use professional tools. Knowing the materials and implements used by those we admire can give us deeper insight into their work. More than that; it can help improve our own.* ***Brian Stelfreeze*** *expresses it thusly:*

I like Brian Bolland. I want to know exactly what type of brush he uses, I want to know what type of paper he uses, I don't care what his first comic book was and I don't care where he was born and whatever. I want to know the nuts and bolts about what he does.

Brian Bolland: When I was drawing LITTLE NYMPHO IN SLUMBERLAND, I was using a Rapidograph — but when I started drawing comics professionally, I really had to learn to use a brush. I now discover that a lot of people have worked with a crow quill pen, but I've never been able to push a pen around at all. I just can't stand the noise it makes on the paper. And the pen also just catches in the paper and goes "flick," and you get splashes of ink everywhere.

Kyle Baker: I use whatever waterproof marker is on sale. Right now I'm using ultra-fine permanent Pilot pens. COWBOY WALLY was done with a dip pen.

Gail Beckett: I use a B6 pen, but we *file* it because the regular B6 is just a little bit thick for me and all the little loops on the B's and the R's tend to close up. I think I have enough *control* now that I probably could use a regular unfiled B6 with some success. And then we use D5 and B5 for the bold lettering.

We use the old dip and wipe and dip and wipe process. I've not found any automatic pen that I can use really successfully. I've not tried old goose quills but I expect I'd probably like those. Sometimes when Dan's not looking I will do all the regular words at a time and leave spaces so that I can do my bold at once, because it takes a few minutes to get the pen to give you *just* enough ink to make the letters just right.

Enki Bilal: My pencil drawings are very rarely detailed. I just lay out some outlines and "mise-en-scene." The most important part is inking and coloring. I use Blanzy pens and Isabey brushes, occasionally Vandehaar. I apply water colors, gouache, acrylics and color pencils.

Jon Davidge: We have a very good new artist, named Robert Bliss. He came in last week

to do a few finishing touches on some of his original pages. And he was using iced tea! Apparently it's a technique which isn't in use very widely — I haven't come across it before.

Jerry De Fuccio: Craft-tint? We don't use that anymore because after a year or so it turns yellow. It's good for the moment — but goes bad pretty quick.

The following tip may seem naive to a 1990s professional writer, but it was hot new stuff when it was first given, in 1982. In any case, the basic message should be heeded by all neophytes who think their continued use of a typewriter doesn't put them at a competitive disadvantage. ***Steve Gerber's*** *suggestion is:*

I recently got a bargain on a Xerox 850 word processing system that I hope is going to make the purely mechanical side of writing a lot easier. You can do *anything* to a manuscript — cut it, move it around, revise it, delete words, change characters' names throughout the entire script — with the touch of a couple of buttons. Prior to this, I'd been working on an IBM Selectric-III, with the self-correcting feature. I thought *that* was amazing, the feather-light touch and not having to reach for the Liquid Paper and the Ko-Rec-Type every twenty-seven seconds — but after working on the word processor for a couple of weeks, even the IBM seems to type in slow-motion. I'm still a bit intimidated by the sophistication of the system, but I'm getting used to it, little by little.

Stan Lee: One of the newest kicks in my life is my word processor. To me, especially if you are a writer, a word processor is an absolutely quintessential adult toy, and I am absolutely ecstatic about the one I just bought.

Mike Higgins: For lettering, I use a strange kind of pen, a hawk quill. I cut off the tip and sand it down. Crow quills are more flexible. The hawk quill is not flexible; it's more stiff. But that's what I letter with, and then I basically use a B-6 or a B-5½ Speedball point for bold. But a lot of people use Speedball points for the regular lettering, too. I don't have as much control over them. I can't get as straight a line, or as consistent an ink flow.

Ferd Johnson: I used a Gillot 290 pen point. They don't make them anymore. It had a spring to it, where you could get a nice thick and thin line. Some guys used 170s, but we all used 290s.

Mike Kazaleh: I use mostly a number two sable brush. I have a whole bunch of pens sitting by where I work. And I use a whole variety of pens for different things, but mostly the figure work is done with a brush.

Todd Klein: The way I do cross-hatching — the lines were put in solid, with a technical pen, and then the fading away effect was done by scratching off areas, like you would do with a scratch board. The material I work on for a logo is plastic vellum, on which it's very easy to scratch off the ink. So, anywhere that you make a mistake, you just scratch it away.

Paul Becton: If you want to have a job in coloring comics, everyone's going to have to learn to do it on the computer, myself included. I fought against it for a long time, because to me, you'll never be able to get a computer to appreciate the beauty of a color on a line. But it's a tool like anything else, and you have to learn to use it if you want to stay on top.

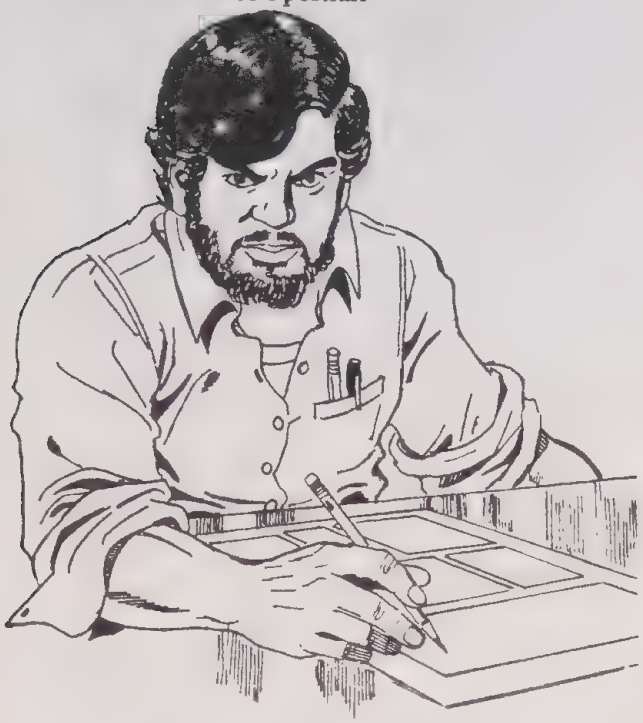
David Anthony Kraft: From the way I've been carrying on about how wonderful it is to work with a computer — how, in fact, it's not really like working at all, but more like having fun — they could practically put me on television as a spokesman for the cause.

Now the wave of the future has come to comic-book art, too, and there will no doubt be some who react violently against the idea, and others who fear that computers will somehow displace the "old-fashioned" artists who draw with pencils and ink. Yet just as it isn't a pencil that makes an artist, neither is it a computer. It's what an artist has inside his head.

Vince Lee: On a computer you can build sets that you couldn't *possibly* build in real life because they would be too tremendously expensive. You can digitally have incredibly complex vast scenes. You know how they used to make matte paintings, and if they wanted motion they would have to cut a little hole and insert something in there? Well, on a computer, you can make a giant city and have everything moving.

Bob Larkin: I usually work in designer's colors — gouache. I was basically working in water colors and then I experienced gouache when I was in college. It's an opaque water color and I can sit down and move right out on it. I can block everything in and soften later on. Oils take longer because of the drying time. I usually dry it with a hair dryer or put it in the oven for fifteen minutes at 350 degrees. I've worked in acrylics, but it's a little too tough because the drying time is too quick. I glaze with acrylics.

GEORGE PÉREZ self portrait



Andy Mushynsky: The brush I use is a Sable #3, currently the Kalinsky brand. I used to use the Windsor-Newtons but I've found that the quality in those has declined over the years. The brush doesn't hold its point as long as it should. It loses its bounce, its tip, more quickly. It just gets very limp and there isn't much you can do with it except fill in the blacks. I find that the Kalinskys hold their points better and are overall better brushes.

For a pen, I use a Hunt #102, basically a stiff crow quill point which I hold onto for a long time until it gets semi-dull. I've experimented with more flexible points and I really like the line they give, but I don't feel comfortable enough with them to really use them.

Bill Oakley: Some of the lettering I've seen for some of the independent companies looks like a lot of their letterers are using Rapidographs. I started out using them and I find them very hard to work with. Get hold of a #107 crow quill point and file it down and work with that. That seems to work best for me, and pretty much anybody I've talked to uses the same thing.

Steve Oliff: I only use Dr. Martin's dyes for my airbrush. I tend to work exclusively with cel-vinyl animation paint, and water-base felt markers. Cel-vinyl is like acrylics, but flexible, and puts a very flat tone down. I discovered it kind of by accident, because I was into animation. I use Buffalo markers and these beautiful pens called Stabilayouts, which have a nice, chiseled point. I blend them on the stats with Q-Tips to get nice gradations. The reason I got into this is because I don't handle a brush particularly well. I've just recently discovered the value of using Frisket paper to airbrush. It gives a clean look.

Tom Orzechowski: I had an old brush that I had used on animation cels, that was completely useless. So I used that for drawing the Dark Phoenix balloons. It was so raggedy that I couldn't control the line, and I figured it matched her character.

George Pérez: I use a Hunt 100 quill. It's got a very flexible point. I buy them by the . dozen, and I use that almost exclusively. I might use a very tiny point, sometimes, if I'm drawing very tiny detail on solid figures as opposed to soft figures, in order to keep the lines dead and flat so it doesn't texture up. All my figure work is done with a Hunt 100, all of my texture work is done with a Hunt 100. It works nicely for drawing the contours and really, really great for drawing hair.

Bob Pinaha: The Ames Lettering Guide is a device that you put on your T-square. It has holes up and down on the line. You put your pencil down in one hole, slide it across the T-square in one direction, then you put your pencil in the next hole, and slide it back the other way, and just keep going back and forth on your T-square and just keep altering holes. It gives you the proper guidelines for doing the lettering. If you ever read the instructions, they make no sense whatsoever.

John Prentice: I used to use the pen for the light lines because I was always so afraid of the reproduction. You know, if you can make a light line with a brush, you can make it as fine as a pen line, but it breaks down in reproduction.

Bill Sienkiewicz: When you get into color there are so many media. There's Dr. Martin's dyes, there's oil, there's acrylics, and there's also what I'm doing in ELEKTRA — that is, working in cut paper. Completely mixed media. I decided to do ELEKTRA in color that way. Not blueline. Completely colored originals.

Brian Stelfreeze: The technique I use is sort of an imprimatur technique where I use the airbrush to lay down a basic tone, a basic localized color, and I use the acrylics to build on top of it. And I usually start with an ink wash. After

I'm finished with my ink washing — which is usually in Paine's gray — I build on top of that with an airbrush overcoat of a single color, and that color is usually a brown or a blue. From there, I start building the colors up on top of it, and I keep working and working until I've got the full figure.

Karl Story: I like to ink technical stuff. I've got my templates, my French curves and my straight edges. I work on those things with almost a passion to make them look as good, as realistic, as I can.

The technical pen I use for the technical work is the Ropring rapidograph. I swear by it. For brushes, I use the Raphael series 8402 #4. That amazes a lot of people — Brian Stelfreeze calls it a mop.

But it comes to the best point. I've used several of the smaller sizes — a 1 and a 3 — but neither of those had as good a point or the snap to the brush that the 4 does. And it holds more ink — I have no problems dipping it into the ink and working for quite a while before I have to dip it again. It has amazed a lot of people who don't believe I can ink with that thing. But I can get hairlines with that brush — it's just amazing.

For ink, I use Higgins Black Magic. If the ink sits for a while and it gets down to the bottom of the bottle, it starts to sludge up a little bit. Then, I'll either replace the ink or water it out a little bit.

Bill Stout: I was trying to recreate the old techniques of Arthur Rackham and Edmund Dulac. I found the closest way to approximate that work is basically this: I make a mixture of sepia and black ink. That makes the lines dark but there's a slightly *warmer* quality to the line work, especially if you brush a raw umber wash on top of that — some of the lines bleed a little and it softens. I like that; it gives a sort of late 19th century parchment look. And then on top of that I start doing watercolor glazes, building up the color, which is actually a technique I learned from Harvey Kurtzman while doing LITTLE ANNIE FANNY. And finally when it's up to an almost finished point, then I take out the Prismacolor pencils and just tick in a few highlights and shadows, beef up the color just a little bit. A lot of work, but it's a neat effect when it's done.

Greg Theakston: I use Dr. Martin's aniline dyes, which have been the traditional coloring tool for comics as far as I know. Dr. Martin's dyes are incredibly brilliant colors. They're just beautiful. Actually, they were designed well before 1920, and the original use for these aniline dyes was to mark bacteria. They would stain bacteria that normally could not be seen. They're beautifully vibrant and have subsequently been used by artists. In their pure out-of-the-bottle state, on a white piece of paper, they're almost neon, they glow so beautifully. However, it's about as indelible a dye as you can use.

Phil Zimelman: Everybody is on a budget when they're first starting out. But I recommend a good tool. If you skimp on the airbrush then your work will show it. As for practice you can use ink on the cheapest paper. Tracing paper, newspaper, anything is okay for practice. The only expense should be in the airbrush and compressor — preferably one that won't disturb anyone else in the house.

Tricks of the Trade

Chris Bachalo: For a woman to be beautiful, she doesn't have to have big boobs. She doesn't have to be prancing around half-naked. It's her sensuality, her softness, it's the way her hair flows on her shoulders or the way the sun bounces off the highlights in her hair, the way she walks, the way she keeps herself, the clothes she wears, the shoes she wears and how she wears them. That's what makes a woman interesting and beautiful. I think Neil Gaiman approaches his female characters in the same way. I think that's why DEATH and SHADE have a very strong female audience. They aren't being insulted by what's being done with female characters.

Stan Drake: The typical approach to drawing sexy women is to draw them with large busts and round, protruding fannies and shapely legs — but that's kind of gotten to be a cliche. It can be crass, and it can be caricatured. I say you don't need to do all that. You can just draw a pretty girl with natural proportions, but boy, you give her nice, fluffy hair. "Fluffy" is my term — draw the hair so that it looks like real hair that's blowing in the wind. When a woman walks, her hair does not sit still. Most guys, when they draw a woman's hair, it's like it's been sprayed with plastic — it doesn't move. Hair moves. The most movable part of a woman's body, besides her ass, is her beautiful *hair*. Practice that, because that is very sexy. You don't have to do it with *big breasts!*

Kyle Baker: The general rule I follow when I paint is: the colors will never come out as good

as the original, so I make the colors twice as bright.

Dan Barry: I went to Austria, looked around, and just by chance someone said they had a house for rent in Kitzbühel. I said, "Wait a minute, I'm getting pretty far afield. I've got to send my strips in." They said I shouldn't worry; the mail in Austria is very reliable, and they were right. I had learned beforehand from guys who went to Europe on vacation and sent stuff back that it could get lost in Customs for three or four months.

I went to the Customs people and explained what I was going to be doing and asked, "Is there a way to avoid my stuff going through Customs?" They said, "No, it has to go through Customs, but you can avoid any delays. Mark it 'Original Artwork of a U.S. Citizen Living Abroad.' Mark it and write a form that says you did this and this is your work; in other words, that you're not *importing* artwork, it's your own artwork, you're just sending it to someone." And they gave me the form number, and that's how you get by the red tape.

Clive Barker: One of the reasons I like Elaine Lee's work is that she has this great sense of elaboration. I suppose it was noticeable in STARSTRUCK, where there was this extraordinary sense of only having the tip of the iceberg where the narrative was concerned, that both Mike Kaluta and Elaine knew all kinds of [redacted] that they weren't telling us.

John Byrne: It's okay for the characters to lie, but the writer should never lie to the readers; otherwise they've got nothing to depend on. I always make sure that characters lie but the writers don't. The omniscient narrator never lies.

Chris Bachalo: I hope to show interesting perspectives on things. Instead of doing a bunch of heads, maybe show a part of a person's head talking or maybe show a person's hand. What are they doing with their hands while they're talking or what are they holding or what is their posture? Maybe we can show their feet and the way they play with them when they're nervous.

Stan Drake: I was directing myself as though I were an actor. I would pose myself. I was trying to get some *motion* and *action* into the *gestures*, which is all I had, really. Soap opera is gestures and action.

Gene Colan: If the conversation calls for something that I think would be helpful to the body language of a character, then I'll have him take his glasses off — you notice how sometimes people hear better or they talk better if they take their glasses off. Suddenly they're getting very serious. They'll take their glasses off as if to say, "What did you just say to me? Now I'm ready to hear it."

Artists do those things, like writers. Somerset Maugham used to travel on a train or a bus or whatever, and he'd have a little notebook pad with him, and he would listen to conversations between people and copy down sentences so that he could use that type of thing in his writing. Artists are always on the lookout for expressions and the way people walk and talk and that kind of stuff. Any true artist generally does that.

Jerry Dumas: A lot of times we have to turn the scene around. People who don't study comic strips don't know about this sort of thing, like you'll have two guys walking along talking, one is on the left and one is on the right, so the one on the left talks first because that's the balloon you're going to read first.

But in the second panel if the *other* guy is

STAN DRAKE

talking first, then somehow you've got to attack that panel from another angle. You've got to get around behind him. There's no way you can have him talk first without turning the camera around.

John Byrne: One of the things that has happened is that working as a writer/artist I've developed an economy. I realized that if you pick the right shot, you don't need three shots. And I've also come to the realization — one of the sort of primary mistakes that I've found that people make, writer-artists particularly, is conversations tend to be broken down into one character speaks in the first panel, another character speaks in the second panel, the first character speaks again in the third panel. I always look at it and say that's one panel, that's just the placement of the balloons. And out of that I started to realize how much more can be compressed into it.

Mark Gruenwald: I have a theory that there are only three things that a writer can do to make an immediate, dramatic sales difference. What a writer can do to goose sales involves three Cheap Tricks — Capital C, Capital T. Trick number one — change the main character's costume. The second Trick is to kill off someone major. That'll always wake people up and at least make that issue sell. It won't necessarily affect the following issues, whereas the new costume may actually have an accumulative effect, as long as it's not a one-issue wonder. The third thing is replace the title character, so that you have the illusion of change.

Larry Hama: Wally Wood would make up slogans and put them on the wall and then he would in practice ignore them. His most famous one was: "Never draw anything you can copy, never copy anything you can trace, never trace anything you can cut out and paste up."

Ed Hannigan: I write my scripts out longhand on tracing paper and lay them on the artwork to see if it will all fit. Then I usually end up throwing out fifty percent of it.

Kelley Jones: If I have a problem coming up with something, I just sit down and figure it out pragmatically. What has to be in the panel? Who is the main figure? From what angle would I get the most visual impact? If I answer those questions, I usually have the problem solved.

Todd Klein: If you use zipatone on a logo, and the logo appears in different sizes, it's gonna look wrong. So I try to do everything with random patterns.

Stan Lee: One thing I always tried to do was take things that were disadvantages and try to make a plus out of them. For example, I think there was a time when I had Spider-Man or some character walking down the street and he just got into the costume and I thought it looked silly. So I had the character say, "I feel like a nut, dressed like this."

John Byrne: Going to conventions gave me a good idea of what the fans thought was coming, and if they were too close to what was actually coming, then I would change what was coming.

Angus McKie: I learned the importance of brevity from British comics. Why use more words than you have to? One thing that I always liked about Richard Corben's work was that he never used lots of words.

Rod Reed: I always put in as little description as possible — except in key scenes, where it was important to have action, settings and background to further the story.

Frank Miller: You need to change tone, to change mood. Anything — drama, tension, humor, you name it — can get tedious if it isn't contrasted with something else. Often the most effective scenes in a story come from playing humor off horror, or *vice-versa*. I'm much more in touch with this when I'm executing the story than when I'm plotting it. So I've taught myself to take liberties with my own material.

Ken Mitchroney: When we're doing storyboards and things, we're coming up with gags, and the better moments are the ones not shown. We show the impact, we show the blast, and that's all you need to see. You've got your setup, you've got your gag, you've got your payoff. There's no reason to show entrails floating in the water, just go on with the story. It would slow the pacing down, bring it to a stop, a big standstill.

Alan Moore: Much of comics writing comes down to finding interesting ways to change scenes. I use overlapping dialogue a lot. That relies on the coincidence of what people are saying being relevant to a scene miles away, so the words link the scenes.

Willie Peppers: I usually will do a logo the same way I will do a costume design; if I sit down and just try to create something it turns out far less than my expectations, but if I can start talking about it, thinking about what I want to do, and just let something hit me, then just get a basic sketch down on paper before I forget, that usually gives me the best results.

John Prentice: Newspaper comic strips are going to get so small that you can't read them. I had to make the lettering bigger, and I had to simplify the drawing, because the reproduction is so bad when the papers shrink it down so small. You have to adapt. You try to make the thing *look* bigger, and one way you do that is if you can get a drawing going clear to the top of the panel. You put the balloon on the bottom or on the side or something, just to try to get the drawing to go clear to the top. You can't do it in all the panels, but you do it when you can do it.

Rod Reed: Writing newspaper strips has this advantage — if you think up a good plot it can go on for three months, whereas a good plot for a comic book will be used up in eight or ten pages and then you must think up another. Also, a comic-book story is tight — if scheduled for ten pages it must not run eleven, whereas a strip is open-ended and could run on indefinitely.

George Roussos: I could sit down and ink 24 pages in about a day. I sat down with a pen and outlined a whole job in about 10 hours — less with a brush — then went back and spotted blacks. But I wouldn't bring it in the next day, because I didn't want them to know I was so fast.

John Prentice: I found out dealing with Murray Boltinoff that if you took him complete pencils, he would *always* find something he'd want you to change. But if I took him in very rough breakdowns, he couldn't see what was going on. And he wouldn't admit it, so he wouldn't make any changes.

Charles M. Schulz: I never test ideas on anyone else. I don't think you can trust people because they want to be polite.

Ken Selig: Never use verbiage when a prop says it better.

Marc Silvestri: In a comic book I think you *have* to vary your camera angles and all of that stuff, the long shot and the close-up. Otherwise you bore the reader.

Dave Sim: One of the things with somebody who's as meticulous and as brilliant at rendering as Gerhard is, is that they tend to avoid solid black, thinking of it as a short cut. Why put an area of solid black in there when I can put eight thousand cross-hatched lines? He's obviously learned just how much you can get with areas of solid black. It doesn't matter where you put them. You can spend five hours cross-hatching that area or go in with a roller. And if it looks better going in with a roller, do that.

John Romita Sr.: Stan told me I was still thinking like a romance artist, that now I had to think a lot wilder, that I couldn't have a guy take an elevator down when he could leap out a window, that I couldn't pound mildly on a desk — he had to break the desk.

Stan Lee: What I always tried to do in the comics was give every character his own individual style. Captain America wouldn't fight like Daredevil, and neither of them would fight like Iron Man or like someone else. They should all have their own styles.

Walt Simonson: What I've done when I've gotten a project, whether it was THOR, FANTASTIC FOUR or MANHUNTER, is to draw it in a fashion that I think is appropriate for that character or that set of circumstances. In MANHUNTER, we wanted to make it as realistic as possible. I went back and looked at a lot of the MODESTY BLAISE work. The METAL MEN was basically wonky cartoon fun. THOR, when I did it for three or four years, was, in a way, a conservative book. It's a book that reflects back. It's a book of mythology. The tension in the book was created by blending mythology and science fiction. The storytelling wasn't particularly flashy and was pretty conservative. I tried to get big images with big perspectives. FANTASTIC FOUR was different, a hard-edged comic. I don't know if I ever ruled a line in THOR; in FANTASTIC FOUR I ruled lots, to create a hard edge for the high-tech look and feel.

Art Spiegelman: I've started using a system of drawing that I got from Harvey Kurtzman, which is building up the drawing in layers, starting with the light colors and then bringing the drawing into focus with the darker color pens. So there's a simple surface with a lot of information embedded that doesn't show.

Chic Stone: On the subway from New York to Brooklyn I would write a story and then hand it to Stan Lee. By the end of the day he would either okay it or turn it down. It was a great way to make extra money while riding the subway to work.

Arthur Suydam: I'm developing a technique of sketching everything out first on paper, and I capture as much action as I can, the kind of action that I want in it, and from there I trace over that and just tighten it up. But I always keep the action of that sketch, rather than re-work the sketch. Because if you keep re-working the sketch, it just loses more and more life.

GREG THEAKSTON

Greg Theakston: Something a lot of colorists don't know is that somewhere on a color piece, there must be a place for your eye to rest. Look at Leroy Neiman's colors, which are hot, neon, vibrant. You can't look at a Leroy Neiman for long because there's no place for your eye to rest. There's nothing to complement the colors. So even in my most colorful pieces I try to give you something that's an off-variation of a color, just to play against the rich color, the true color.

Don Rosa: I don't see my art as it is, but as I'd intended it to be. The best I can do is hold a finished page up to a mirror, so that it looks completely unfamiliar — like someone else drew it — and I can see hings out of proportion.

Anthony Tollin: Jack Adler would turn a book upside-down to look at it. That may seem like just a gag at first. But he was looking for things that stood out that shouldn't stand out, and that's frequently easier to see when you're just looking at the color and aren't distracted by what's happening.

Mark Waid: Living apart from civilization certainly makes it easier to work.

Collaboration: Assembling a Comic Book

The greatest masters of the comics form — Carl Barks, Will Eisner, Hal Foster, etc. — did it all themselves. For us lesser mortals, whose talents aren't as broad in scope, it's necessary to collaborate with other creators, whose abilities complement our own . . .

Marc Swayze: Russell Keaton was a truly great professional and I am grateful to have had the opportunity to work with him, and particularly at that time in my career. From him I got the conviction that a good comic-strip man could "do it all". . . layout, pencil, ink, letter, even write. I never heard of the assembly-line system until I got to New York, to work for Fawcett.

Frank Miller: When I'm working alone, I have control over everything. I'm able to tell a story in a particular way that I feel it or hear it. When I'm working with another artist, I get to feed off them. When I work with Dave Gibbons, I get to play to all of his strengths as an artist. The story that I'll come up with for Dave Gibbons or Geoff Darrow is going to be very, very different than the one I come up with for myself. You get involved with the other person. You study their work. You start wanting to see them draw things. And it affects the kind of story you write. It's been an education each time out.

***Dean Motter** offers counterpoint to those tip-givers who opine that the best comics are those in which a single creator is responsible for both major components of the story:*

I've been working professionally in the commercial field long enough to know that any project that needs scheduling and has to be commercially successful is the result of the efforts of a lot of people. A one-man show ultimately ends up being as strong or as weak as the respective strengths or weaknesses of that one man.

Arn Saba: I have no compunction at all about using other people's talents when I can't do something. It's a fun thing to do. It doesn't diminish my talents or diminish my achievements — it simply increases them. I get the best of my own work, and the best of other people's.

John Arcudi: Some of my scripts — especially if I know ahead of time the artist I'm working with — it helps to leave out detail and let them go. Usually they please you, and they *surprise* you.

Enki Bilal: Concerning my collaborations

with Pierre Cristin, he was always shooting first, giving me the story outline of a theme we'd discussed earlier. His instructions give me freedom — enabling me to visualize in flexible conditions. My part is to direct the story, to make it live.

Steve Bissette: In one writer's scripts, there were many things that frustrated me: repetition; saying in the text what is already shown in the picture; multiple actions in the panel, which he tended to do quite often — you get an action in the foreground, an action in the middle ground, and something important in the background. Too busy. Plus, he liked to use his text to bring a slant to the story that was beyond the pictures — well and good, but when you have a panel with three or four actions plus a text-heavy page, you don't have a pleasurable comic book!

Frank Miller: I think it's a conceit on the part of writers to think that the character work is strictly their domain and not the artist's. Strongest moments of character happen through action. The term "character scene," means that now some character is going to explain to you in precise detail exactly how he feels so you don't have to pay much attention.

Steve Ringgenberg: I think Chris Claremont's work suffers a great deal from cliché and overwriting. That's a major problem with a lot of comics: the artwork is so inexpressive the writer is forced, like Claremont, to write long, detailed captions explaining the character's inner state.

Max Allan Collins: When we started out with MS. TREE, it was designed to be an experiment in coherence. We looked around at what was happening in comics and what I saw was that, from a writing standpoint, there was a lot of overwriting, and a lot of explaining what was in the picture that we were seeing, so that the redundance factor was high. And Terry was seeing a lot of well-designed but incoherent pages. We decided to revert to the classic.

Ed Hannigan: I think that the best writers in comics are the ones that are also artists. Frank Miller is an obvious choice. Obviously there are good writers that are not good artists. But even people like Alan Moore, you find out that at one time they were trying to be an artist or they do a lot of sketching.

Steve Englehart: It's no secret that I wanted to be an artist but couldn't do it. But trying to think as an artist for all those years was good training to write for comics. I can visualize the pages.

Larry Stroman: I've never really enjoyed writing. I may at some point — although I haven't seen too many examples of an artist doing his writing and doing a good job of it. I think you should focus on what you're good at.

Chris Claremont: It's a lot easier for a writer to know his limitations than it is for artists to realize their limitations as writers. I know the minute I try to draw a picture that I haven't got it. It's a lot easier to fool yourself with words.

Vince Fago: I liked a lot of white space in my strips. I felt that when a guy writes he likes to write a lot of words for a panel, whereas the artist likes to put a lot of drawings in the panel, and the two are competing against each other — unless the writer and the artist are the same.

Ed Hannigan: The interesting thing about comics is that it combines both sides of the brain because it has linear, verbal material along with abstract, art material. In essence the right and left sides of the brain are working together while being in conflict with each other. No other medium has those two forms combined to such an extent.

Ramona Fradon: Dale Messick did a lot of texture. She used cross hatching and lines. Her figures drifted off into shading. It was a much looser, less tightly organized layout that she used also. She was more comic because her drawing as a whole reflected the more comic stories that she wrote. The writers I've been working with are less comic, so my drawing style is more in the romance comic style.

Kelley Jones: Sam Kieth has a very aggressive style. I don't mean by subject matter, but I mean that he just attacks paper. He really works his paper over. That's something that I'm interested in because I work very hard to do this graceful linear type of stuff. I think we both have elements of each other's style we want to incorporate. That's a big reason for our working together. A lot of times when we get on the phone it's not mutual admiration but, "How do you do this? Where did that come from?"

To a certain extent, he's going to have to come part way to meet me and I'm going to have to go part way to meet him. But I'm not going to ape Sam and I don't want Sam to ape me. We're just going to do our thing and mix them together. It's a lot like the old Wrightson/Kaluta collaborations in the respect that it was hard to tell who did what panel half the time. It didn't always look like Bernie Wrightson or Michael Kaluta. It

always looked like somebody else. If you go back to the Frazetta/Williamson collaborations in the 1950s, it was pencilling and inking on both ends. No one was doing one set assignment.

Michael Gilbert: One of the things I always try and do in my own work is to develop a number of different art styles, to push in a lot of different directions. When I'm working with a certain artist, as a team, I try and go for their strengths. I try to accommodate my style to a certain degree so I can bring out the best in the artist I'm working with.

Dick Giordano: We have two artists working on one book. Artist #1 has the responsibility of layout, design and storytelling values. Artist #2 has responsibility to focus attention, in one area or another, through blacks or in color. Both artists serve different functions but they are both artists.

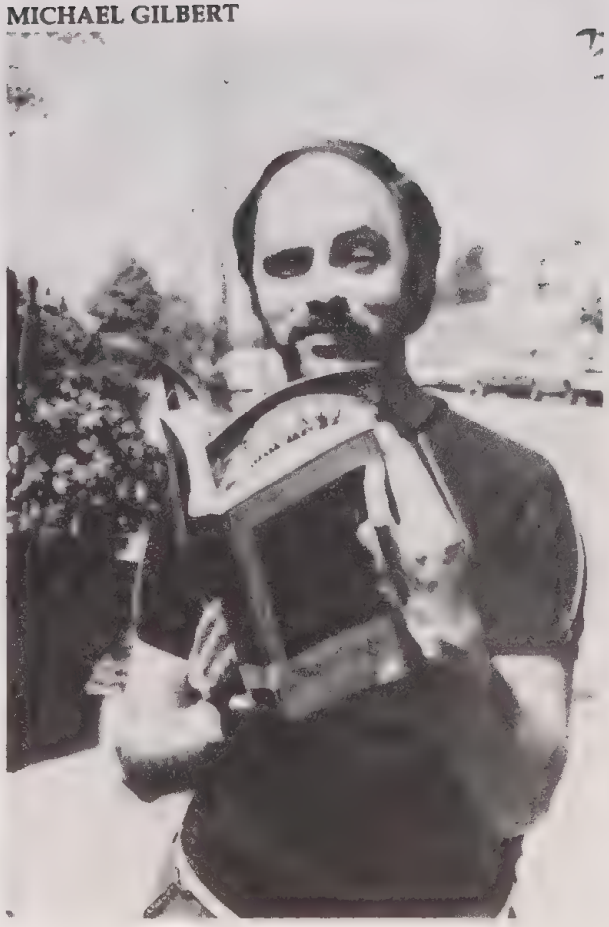
Steven Grant: I work in a peculiar way. I haven't been doing the regular full scripts. What I've been doing is writing film scripts. Which means that all the dialogue and captions are there, and the flow of the story, and the narrative are very concrete, but the artist still has the option to break it down any way he sees fit, in terms of what he puts on the page. He can see one scene and put it in another place. The structure is there, but the form is pretty much up to him.

Kelley Jones: I generally don't follow preset layouts. When I worked with Neil Gaiman, I didn't really follow what he was saying except in certain circumstances where the rhythm mattered. When I worked with Mike Baron, he does his own layouts, but he doesn't intend you to follow. I think the good moments come out of your own inspiration.

Chris Claremont: When comics are done right, when the ideal is also the reality, it's a collaboration in the truest sense of the word. The lines between the writer and the artist in terms of generating a plot, who generates the plot, tend to blur because each partner contributes that little something or that much something. One person might come up with the basic choreography, the other with the rationale that makes it work, or the twist that makes it unique, or have a better idea as to how a scene should be played to make it more in line with something else, with the theme of the book or with the theme of the story.

Frank Miller: It's important to cross-pollinate, or even to just have someone impartial look at the stuff you've been sweating over. One of the reasons I was glad to work with Dick Giordano is that the discipline I was newest at was inking, and I couldn't get better advice on the subject.

MICHAEL GILBERT



Will Meugniot: DNAGENTS is as close to a total collaboration as you're ever going to get between a writer and an artist. There are areas where Mark Evanier overlaps me on the graphics and there are areas where I overlap him on the writing. And as far as who created what, we've discussed this and my feeling — and I think Mark's, too — is that as soon as you get into "I created this," that's the first sign that the team's going to disintegrate.

Frank Miller: I've been in collaborations where I've clearly been the dominant, and others where my partner has been dominant. Collaboration should be approached with a sense of generosity, and I believe in flexibility.

Alan Moore: There are only two kinds of artists I wouldn't like to work with. The first kind consists of artists who write better than I do — Eisner, Miller, Eddie Campbell. The second kind

would be anyone who thought their art more important than the stories. I don't consider my stories more important than the art. It's got to be equal.

Jim Novak: Writers, especially, and also artists realize the importance of the letterer. After an artist spends a lot of time on a page, he doesn't want a letterer coming in and destroying the layout. You can ruin a page by putting a balloon over a guy's head. You've taken the artist's work and destroyed what he's strived for. It's the letterer's responsibility to do a neat, clean job and also to be unobtrusive so that people don't notice it. It's got to be legible, logical and have style. Creative energy goes into the sound effects and title. A lackluster title gives a lackluster introduction to the story.

Bob Pinaha: The biggest problem a letterer has to deal with is that pencillers have no idea whatsoever of proper composition when it comes to lettering. They compose the panels and the pages in a visual style which moves the story along, but they do not take into consideration the space inside the composition in which the lettering will go. When I did the first issue of MAGE, Matt Wagner, the artist, had all the balloons inked in when he sent me the artwork, so all I had to do was place the lettering in according to his script. But he'd have enormous balloons where maybe four or five words went, and in another panel have 25 words in a tiny balloon. It's the letterer's job to place the balloons in the best place — where they'll move the story along.

Alan Moore: I've learned to gear my stories to an individual artist's strong points. I can't claim to be an individual artist in my own right. The end result, the strip you see on the page, is the meeting between me and the artist. That's where the creation is. I've been incredibly lucky with the artists I've worked with.

George Pérez: Some artists are big on characterization, others on action. You have to adjust your writing style for that. For some artists I've written full scripts, to make sure they understand what should be emphasized and to show that you can fit a certain amount of copy in a page if you design the page correctly.

Tad Pietrzykowski: I put down the plot to a particular story, then I'll break it down into how the story would work page by page. I break it down in such a way that it can be segmented, and then I let the artist use his own style to maybe *change* that if he wants to. He might think this particular page looks like a square peg in a round hole and change something, and that's *great*. I encourage them to throw their own perspective into it because I *love* seeing my story look *different* from how I envisioned it.

That's how I think a creative team should work, by really sort of bouncing off each other.

John Prentice: A lot of time if you have a script from a writer, you'll think of how it could be done differently simply because of the way you draw. Of course a writer can't be expected to visualize it the way an artist does. But when you *combine* the writing and the artwork, you have more control of the story, of the excitement and the action.

Ron Randall: I don't have too much trouble working with another writer. I'll occasionally come up against a scene or a sequence where I'm having trouble visualizing what they have in mind, and of course that doesn't happen very often when I'm drawing my own stories because when I'm writing it the pictures tend to suggest themselves right into my head. But the writing for me is a fairly painful process sometimes, so there are certain advantages to letting somebody else do that share of the work.

Rod Reed: "The Cecil B. DeMille Complex" has been a running gag between Kurt Schaffenberger and me for some time. But gags have a grain of truth. You can picture the artist at his lonely drawing board picking up his script and saying, "Good grief! Another scene from BEN HUR!" One sheds a tear. No doubt I sometimes put into a scene more characters and action than Kurt deemed necessary or appropriate. In any case, his bleats didn't fall on deaf ears. I modified my DeMille complex. I put in lots of one-head close-ups.

Larry Stroman: If I get a story that says such and such walks through a crowd of 100 people, it's a very short statement. But I have to draw 100 separate people, and I only have a certain amount of time to draw a story. I have to ask myself, if I draw the page without the 100 people, will it affect how the rest of the book works? That's why there can be major conflicts between artists and writers. A lot of times the writer gets upset because the artist didn't properly interpret what he wrote. A lot of times the artist will do what he has to do to get the book done on time.

Joe Rubinstein: Comic books are a visual medium. People, I think, buy them for what

TOM YEATES

they're looking at. Then if the story isn't substantial, they probably won't come back.

Louise Simonson: Writers always grumble about some aspect of the art, no matter how brilliant the art is, and artists always grumble about some aspect of the plot. It's just the way life is.

Julia Mather: Good writers of comic books sometimes have bad artists to tell the story, and sometimes good art is destroyed by 47 balloons on a page.

Walt Simonson: I've found over the years that when I work with a writer I haven't worked with before, inevitably it takes me several issues to get accustomed to that writer, to the way he thinks, the way he works, whatever. Because the work that you do is teamwork, and it takes a while to pull together as a team.

Jim Starlin: There has to be compromise between story and art. You can't write the Great American Novel and make it work within a comic book, because you'll squeeze out all the room for the visuals. On the other hand, if you haven't got any story — just ideal visuals — it becomes dull, too, because there's no meat to it.

Brian Stelfreeze: A lot of times it's real important to bring in other hitters to kind of just give the work a new life, give it some sort of a twist that you may not think about yourself.

Mike Vosburg: It's very difficult working with writers who give you too many cerebral ideas, or too many words, and then the action will be crammed into one or two frames. The easiest script I've ever worked off of in my life was one of Howard Chaykin's. He gave me a little synopsis, like six lines, and each line was its own little picture. It was so simple to do because he told me the story not in a series of words or ideas or interactions but basically in a series of pictures. That's what we work in.

Tom Yeates: Many of us, especially when we first get started, have a real mental block about drawing something that someone else describes for you. I've never had any problem sitting down and drawing out of my head, I've got tons of images that just come out. But when somebody tells you what to draw, that's something else entirely.

Ted Boonthanakit: I've never been able to understand people who cannot take directions. All your life you must take direction, some way or another, and I don't have any problem with that — if I am paid in full what I charge the clients. It's *their* project. If you are *adamant* against something, then you don't do it. It is their project, it's not yours, and you're being paid to do it.

We saved this unique insight into the working methods of one of America's foremost husband and wife comics creating teams for last. ***Richard Pini*** *offers:*

I take A through L and Wendy takes M through Z. I get all the punctuation that has round things on it and Wendy gets all the spikey punctuation.

More on Collaboration: Marvel Style vs. Full Script

If there were any doubt that this book contains contradictory tips, this section should put it to rest. The astute reader will consider what all these estimable comics professionals have to say, and then make up his own mind.

Terry Beatty: The artist cannot read the writer's mind. I have trouble with the concept of going in and drawing the characters doing things, and kind of hopping around, and kind of following this outline to a story and not knowing what they are saying. I want my script. I want my characters to have their dialogue. I want my actors to know their lines before they go on stage. I really believe in full script.

I think drawing from a plot is like sending

actors out onto a stage with an outline, rather than a play to do. It can be pretty good. It can succeed and it can also fall flat on its butt. And I don't think that you are going to get a HAMLET out of improv.

Sal Buscema: I prefer working from a plot. I enjoy having as much freedom as possible, and the full script is terribly restrictive. I've worked both ways, but I prefer the plot.

Max Allan Collins: There is one advantage that I see to working Marvel-style — If you don't know who your artist is, the art is going to come back to you so you can "fix it" in the captions and the dialogue.

I really don't want to work so-called "Marvel Style" again. There was too much of my sort of having to "fix" things. I had to look at what the artist decided to do, and extrapolate from my plot, varying from my own intentions, and somehow figure out how to move the boat back somewhat to where I intended it to be.

J.M. DeMatteis: You can get away with a lot more in Marvel-style than you can full script. People coming in and doing it Marvel-style or whatever name they choose to apply to it — so much of the weight goes to the artist that you really don't learn that way. When you're sitting down and writing full script it's almost like writing a film script. Everything is there — Panel One . . . Camera Angle . . . everything that's in that panel. You have to pace the story. You have to tell the story visually, and then the artist interprets your directions. But with Marvel-style, if you want to get lazy you can get lazy. You can just kinda say, "Here's the outline and here you go, artist, and go ahead and do all the work."

Michael Gilbert: As far as the Marvel way, in general, is concerned, I think it's a great racket for the writers. There's no way we can get around it. The classic examples, as far as I'm concerned, are some of the early Steve Ditko, Jack Kirby creations. Ditko, from all appearances, was doing a vast majority of the writing on SPIDER-MAN.

Gene Colan: Today the writers tell you everything! Most of them try to give the artist everything but the kitchen sink, the angles and so on. They're the directors and the artists are just there to follow the instructions, which I, frankly, do not like! I think it takes away from any creativeness that the artist may have. After reading a story you have conceived an idea of how something should look, and then the writer comes along and says he wants it a different way.

Steve Bissette: The artist is not just a pair of hands there to bring life to the writer's story. The writers who feel that are short-shrifting themselves, and their artists, cutting off avenues of creative interchange. It's a visual/verbal medium, each as important as the other. If one's weak and the other's strong, it makes little difference which.

Larry Hama: I do page-by-page plots, because I like to have a real specific page break. I like to try to engineer my stories so that there's a little bit at the end of each page that makes them want to turn the page; just a little bit of mystery or a little bit of what's going to happen next. I generally plot it page by page and I try to figure out an average of four to six panels per page and engineer it that way, and it pretty much seems to work out.

Ed Hannigan: Marvel style was always a crap shoot on *everybody's* part. The scripter would write out a big plot and then if the artist was inspired or real good he would do a great story, but if he *wasn't* he'd do a mediocre story. Or the artist would do all of these great pages and then hope against hope that the script would be *fantastic*, but maybe the scripter had a bad day. You never knew until the end what the thing was going to read like.

It's great if you have an artist and a writer who are in tune with each other and can communicate and know what they're doing. Then you can really have that kind of magic.

Stan Lee: I would do the plotting very quickly, in about an hour. Then I would give the plot to the artist. So to me the writing came in when the artist would give me back the artwork and I'd put the copy in.

But I did much more than that, really. I also served as editor and art director. While I was putting the copy in, I'd be making notes on changes that the artist should make in the artwork. And I would very often deviate from my own original plot because as I looked at the artwork and as I saw how the story was going, I'd often get ideas that I hadn't had when I wrote the plot. So like as not, the stories would turn out to be quite a bit different than I had originally planned them.

And then, of course, the artists would always add their own things above and beyond what I had told them in the plot. Jack Kirby, for example. He would change my original plot so much half the time I couldn't recognize it. Which

was fine with me; it made it more interesting. It was always like doing a crossword puzzle when I was doing these things.

Jack Kirby: I had no script. I was never given a script. What would happen was I would do a sci-fi story. I would come in, I would tell Marvel what it was gonna be like, and what the story was about, and I told them when they would have the story and I worked very hard, because you can draw a script and not write it at the same time.

Paul Levitz: When you're working with an artist whose aims are sympathetic to yours, you often do your best work Marvel style. I work full-script when I'm working with an artist who prefers that method, or when I'm working with an artist I don't know, or do know but don't necessarily agree with. It doesn't mean the artist is bad. He just has a different storytelling approach.

Alan Moore: I send artists a full script. I make suggestions as to the camera angles, the lighting, the background, the mood, sometimes the color, the posture, and the body language. I try to put everything in there. But I make sure that the artists know that if they've got a better idea, they're free to use it. After all, they've got better visual imaginations than me. I provide them with a springboard, so if they're facing a blank sheet of paper after a really heavy weekend — their families have been wiped out by Hurricane Tracy or something — they've got somewhere to start.

George Pérez: I definitely prefer a script that I have a lot of leeway with. There are very, very rare exceptions. Alan Moore always does full scripts; his writing is so intense that I would want him to work in the most comfortable way possible and I would work with that. I have worked with full scripts before; it's a discipline, wherein you're definitely trying to capture the writer's vision and still put as much of yourself as you can. You're bound by the confines of what the characters are saying, since the dialog has to remain the same. You may change the panel layout, you may change the exact scene, but you have to keep the dialog intact. And that's a good discipline. It sometimes teaches you the real fundamentals of storytelling.

Mike Royer: Most writers in the "Marvel style" would do their outline or synopsis, the artist would literally choreograph the story, and then the writer would write the snappy dialogue. David Anthony Kraft did the work the same way, except that he would put tissue paper over the art and make sure that what he wrote would fit in the space available and not screw up the balance of the artwork and the spatial relationships. That impressed me because he not only cared about what he was writing, but he cared and understood that the art and the lettering were part of the same piece of art.

Alvin Schwartz: I never worked for Marvel Comics. I thought I might try, but I couldn't see working the way they did there, where the writer let the artist draw the story before writing the dialogue.

The question of Marvel-style vs. full-script applies even to an artist who is his own writer (and vice versa). ***Jim Starlin*** *says:*

I used to write Marvel-style strictly, and I always had trouble, because I'd have my drawings in front of me and they became sort of graven images that I really hated to change. Yet when I started scripting, a lot of times I found that what I wanted to write was not down there in the drawings. So I've started doing little thumbnail drawings, eight of them to a loose-leaf sheet, which are the page breakdowns. This gives me a chance to change my story three times along the way. I do it once in thumbnails. If I'm scripting as I go along and find there's a problem, hey, I don't have to redraw anything. I can just change it and add another panel or something. Then, when I start doing the pencilling, if I find that the script isn't working with the art, I can make a last-minute change in the script. So by the time I've got it down to the point where it's lettered, I have about as lean and clean a story as I can possibly get.

Larry Stroman: I definitely prefer working with plots. It allows you to do your own pacing. A lot of times when writers write, they sometimes don't consider that they write more than you can fit possibly into the page restraints that you have for the story. When I get a plot, I can determine how many images I can fit on a particular page.

Matt Wagner: So far, I have never worked full-script, either for myself or with another artist. I find that seeing the character realized and visualized will suggest a whole lot more to me than just an ethereal thought. Seeing the character's face suggests slang, the character's past and that's how I work for myself; I draw the story and then go back and script it.

VI. A Little of This, a Little of That

FRANK FRAZETTA

Frank Frazetta: When I first started painting, "Oh, you like it? Keep it." But it was a little irritating to find that they suddenly turned around and sold it when they were offered money. And the next person in turn sold it for maybe double, then triple, and I just watched this market create itself out there and I began to feel like a fool. You know, I have to eat, too, and pay the rent, and here I'd given something away and here it was wandering around the country and going for, like, five thousand bucks. That was five thousand I certainly could have used. So at that point, we kind of wised up.

John Beatty: Lately I've asked for pencil copies before I accept a job, then I can look at them and tell if I want to ink the job, and if it's something that will keep my enthusiasm up. If the enthusiasm isn't there, it's a waste of time for me to do it because I won't enjoy it, and I'll just struggle through the whole thing.

Ann DeLarrye-Gold: It's a fallacy that only women can write for women.

Dave Gibbons: It's not really that difficult to make a muscular superhero in action look interesting. That doesn't strike me as any great trick. The great trick is to make two people in a room talking look interesting. If you look at a Garcia Lopez page, even when there's nothing violent going on, there's always dynamism, strong compositions, and carefully placed characters. That impresses me far more than another fist coming out of the page.

Bane Kerac: When I'm confined to, say, a graphic-novel format of 44 pages, in the morning I hate myself and in the afternoon the rest of the world — because it irritates me to think about page sixteen while I still draw page four. What if the death of my main character happens on page eight?!?

Todd Klein: The places where a letterer gets to be creative are the sound effects, the titles, and the logos. Standard lettering is something that should be competent and easy to read, but otherwise not very noticeable. In general, the lettering should not be something that the reader stops to look at.

Todd McFarlane: I wouldn't mind taking a crack at Batman. Not because I have any great fondness for Batman, but he's *probably* one of the easiest guys to *draw!* You just put that cape around his body and you never have to draw anatomy. The odd hand and the odd foot, the head, and this cape all over the place, and you're done! You don't have to worry about whether his biceps are in the right place. That's why I like capes, 'cause capes cover up a lot of the anatomy.

Moebius: Every morning I do *t'ai chi* and I swim in the ocean. Sometimes I run or play tennis. I think it's very important for an artist to be in good fitness.

John Cullen Murphy: Hal Foster would have little thumbnail sketches of ideas for compositions and he said I didn't have to follow them unless I wanted to. I did at the beginning and then later on I did my own.

Steve Oliff: The coloring I don't like is either too washed out or has too many primaries competing with one another.

George Roussos: Stan Lee used to hate grays. He told me, "I don't want to see this pastel, hazy stuff. I don't want to see grays. We don't want to prove to the audience that we can color. We want something simple, powerful and direct." I said, "Okay, Stan." When I gave him what he wanted, he'd come in and rave.

Andy Yanchus: I have been criticized as

being too flamboyant — especially in using too many of the primary colors, lots of strong, brilliant stuff. But I think after working closely with everybody's coloring and seeing everything — how it prints eventually — I think that type of coloring is necessary for the regular books. You really have to allow for any type of potential printing or separating error that can happen. You have to go for the maximum contrast. Subtle coloring and shading might look great on the original — but if it doesn't print, then it is not worth a damn.

Steve Rude: One of the interesting things about working with Mike Baron is that he will come to me with ideas that sound outrageously crazy, too *drastic*. That's the key. When I feel that it's too drastic for people to buy, I know it has to be done.

Stan Sakai: I prefer black-and-white, I guess because you can't hide anything with black-and-white. What you see printed is what the artwork looked like. I don't like to work with tones or airbrushing or washes or zip-a-tone just because you can hide a lot of detail that way.

FERD JOHNSON and friend

*It was **Alvin Schwartz** who, in 1946, first named The Penguin "Oswald Chesterfield Cobblepot":*

I've always had a fondness for unusual, outlandish names. I used to come up with them for fun, when it seemed appropriate to the story. I can't do that with every character, but sometimes it works.

David Scroggy: I think the reason ELFQUEST was such a Cinderella story is not because it's woman-oriented — I don't think it is — but because it appeals *equally* to men and women.

Dave Sim: A lot of things that are very vivid in my mind don't actually work once I sit down and actually draw them the way they have to be. You get it down on the page and wow, you're drawing, and you get a better idea of just how to do it.

Dan Thorsland: As my wife can attest, writing is work. It is really hard work. My hat is off to people like Archie Goodwin and Denny O'Neil and a lot of the people who have managed to do the day job of editing books, then go home on the weekends and write — because I just start going nuts.

What's in a Name?

***Peter Laird** shared this tip in 1985, before TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES became the mega-success it is today:*

I think very strongly that the name is important, because so many people who don't even read comics laugh when they hear the name. They chuckle. Even if it doesn't go beyond a chuckle, there are a lot of people for whom it does, and they go out and buy the book just to see what the hell it's all about.

Ferd Johnson: When Harold Gray submitted his strip, it was called LITTLE ORPHAN OTTO. But Captain Patterson thought it would have more appeal with a little girl.

Shel Dorf: Whenever Chester Gould gave his interviews, he always gave Captain Patterson the credit for changing PLAINCLOTHES TRACY to DICK TRACY.

What's in a Genre?

*The following tip from **Jan Strnad** applies to comics as well as prose publishing. Remember: The store has to know what shelf to put it on.*

I've written a novel that's so far gathered

55 rejections and refusals-to-read. It falls in between genres. I feel that if I'm going to submit it anymore, I need to rewrite it and make it either a science-fiction novel or a mainstream novel. Right now, it straddles the two categories, and that makes it very hard to pigeonhole. One of the big problems I have in even submitting it is that they don't know what department to shuffle it to. So, that was a lesson learned.

Bill Woolfolk: My curse has always been versatility. They do not build statues of people saying, "He was versatile." What happens along the way is — you get pegged. Everybody knows what these top bestsellers will do. My personal problem is, if you like one book of mine, you are certain *not* to like the next — because I don't do the same book.

Rick Bryant: I've done a little bit of everything, from fine art, super-realism, commercial illustration and technical illustration to dolphins, animal painting, portraiture, life drawings, nudes. I do a little bit of everything. It's one of the strengths I have as an artist, and also one of the weaknesses. I don't specialize and no one can really pinpoint me when they give me work or to say, "Hey, that's who *he* is."

Learning from Our Past

Ken Mitchroney: Will Eisner, Kelly Freas — those guys are great. Usually I wind up with these guys at conventions and we do chalktalks and interviews and stuff, and they're *great*. They helped me a lot during the MYTHADVENTURES series. Any of these guys, it's just great, you run into them and go, "I'm having some trouble with this character. What am I doing wrong?" And they'll give you some quick ideas and then you can adapt your style to it.

A lot of guys don't like to listen to the old guys. They think they're senile old farts, but there's a lot they know. We should never take them lightly. We should get them while we can and get the information. I'd kill to talk to Tex Avery again.

Ken Selig: We have a responsibility to extract from the past what is classic. In growing up within our own field, we have the obligation of witnessing what has been good in the past and maintaining what men have established and bringing it along and possibly taking it even further. That's one thing that is being left out of comics. They are not paying enough attention to the past!

Dave Sim: I know that it is tough enough establishing your own voice while doing comics and the *last* thing you need is some boring old fart sitting there saying, "You stole that from me, that's mine there, I first came up with that, nobody thought of that technique until I did." In all of our cases, we are just the custodians of it, each of us has a little piece of whatever it is that fires us all up.

Art Spiegelman: There is a lot of Kurtzman in my art, including the fact that Kurtzman was very specific about developing a syntax for what a page structure might be. Studying his work really was my comic-book correspondence course. That's how I learned to do it and why to do it — even to the extent of modeling certain aspects of my career after Harvey's. I got interested in editing, working on other people's work as well as my own.

Brian Stelfreeze: I'm a big fan of Dean Cornwell and J.C. Leyendecker and also Frank Frazetta. The approach I used was looking at their work and trying to figure out *how* they did what they did. I figured out a technique of using acrylics and colored inks to do what Frazetta did — and later I found out he was using oils. I was totally off the mark.

Cat Yronwode: There are people who are capable of beautiful work who are willfully grinding out sausage. They are simply mechanically producing. They are renderers. They are writers. And an editor, to be good, should be someone who has an overview, a view of where individual writers and artists fit into the continuum of not only history, but present-day comics.

***Sheldon Moldoff** offers a tip to anyone interested in documenting the history of comics:*

I'm amazed that nobody ever gets in touch with me, because I have a complete record of everything that I've done.

*And finally, a tip from **Marc Swayze** is addressed toward those who would like to be part of that history:*

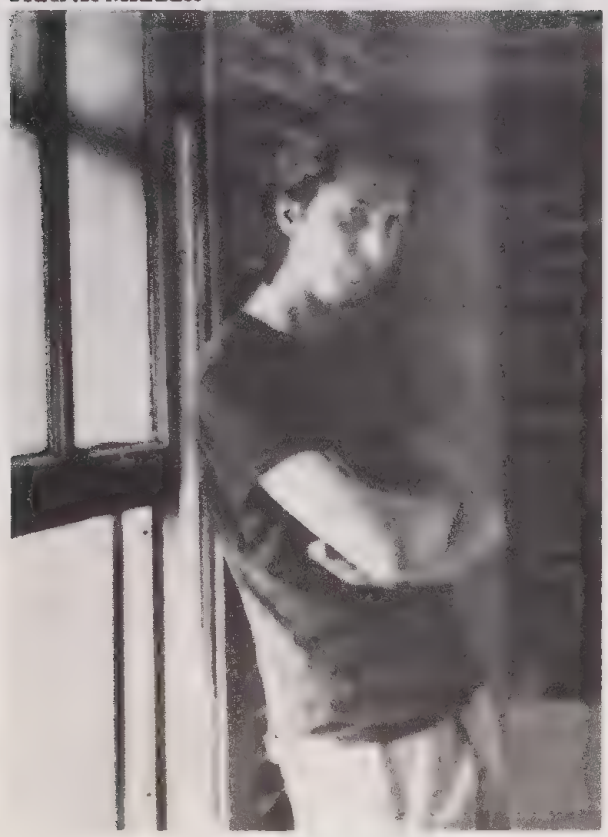
I have done a miserable job of keeping in touch with my old associates — which is probably why I am something of a forgotten man of comics.

Comics and Other Media

***Clive Barker** provides us with a good keynote quote for this section:*

Imagination spreads its wings differently

FRANK MILLER



in each medium. There are things you can do in comic books you can't do in any other medium. Just as there are things you can do in a movie that you can do in no other medium.

Neal Adams: One of the reasons why we see more and more success in the films that have been storyboarded is because you're utilizing the talents of comic-book artists to create the story before it's put on celluloid. The closest relationship that I can make from a good comic book, outside of the direct relationship it has to film, is that a comic book is like pictures from the mind.

It's not pictures from a camera. Pictures from the mind have the freedom of this incredible camera and lighting and all these magical things that could only come from some fantastic expenditure of money and a fantastic imagination, or simply from the imagination of one human mind.

In my mind people are crazy to do multimillion dollar pictures without seeing something on paper first of what's going to be created.

Brent Anderson: Movies have a lot of subtlety and drama and storytelling. The way a cinematographer will light a set adds or subtracts from the drama. I apply some movie techniques to comics rather than try to literally translate them. Some movie techniques work in comics. Some comics techniques work in movies. But not all techniques are interchangeable. There have to be some adaptations made from one to the other.

Frank Miller: Comics are not prose . . . and my personal feeling is that there's a danger of losing a lot of their virtues by not making use of the visual vitality the form is capable of.

Clive Barker: Just as I would never sit down to write a novel wondering what the movie would be like, because I think that way you would end up with a first-draft screenplay rather than a novel, I think it would be very dangerous to go in and create comic books thinking, "This is going to create a great movie," because comic books are a medium unto themselves.

Mike Baron: The comic-book form legitimizes the most outlandish behavior, specifically physical behavior. It is so much harder to convince your audience in other forms, such as prose or movies. You can do it, of course, but it is a lot easier to do it in comics. And as long as comics so easily make impossible things seem possible — you will not only believe that a man can fly, you will believe that a man can shoot strange rays out of his hand — you might as well take advantage of it.

Dan Barry: Let me tell you why I avoid *real* science fiction in FLASH GORDON. When you write a science-fiction novel, or a science-fiction comic book, or a science-fiction short story, you've got the reader. He's there, you've got him. You explain a premise, he understands it, and you carry it on throughout the rest of the story. In a daily strip, you're always working with the assumption that the guy didn't buy the paper Monday and Tuesday and here it is, he's picking it up Wednesday.

Jerry Dumas: You have to do *exactly* in the comic strip what they do in movies with the establishing shot — we *always* have to do establishing shots. That's why the first panel of almost any gag in BEETLE BAILEY or SAM & SILO or any kind of strip like that, unless it's like PEANUTS where it doesn't matter so much what the background is, the first panel is always larger. It's the establishing shot.

So, I have to show sometimes in the first panel that Sarge is talking to Beetle and that

Sarge is wearing his socks, maybe that's important to the gag — that he's not dressed yet. Now he's in his socks, let's say, but he's outside, so I've got to back the camera up and show full figures, not a close-up. So now we've got to move the camera back and we've got to show some buildings, maybe a jeep or two to show that they're on the base, and then I've got to show maybe that it's raining, maybe *that's* important to the gag. I've got to do that whole establishing shot.

Once I've done that, we never have to refer to that again, because the reader knows where he is, what time of the day it is, what the weather is like. I don't have to draw the establishing shot again.

Jan Michael Friedman: A writer always deals in visuals — you have to pay a lot of attention to visuals when you're writing a novel. There's no artist, nobody to help the reader other than you, so you really have to get a knack for describing things. But coordinating that with an artist is a different skill and you really have to think about it in different ways. Breaking down the action is something that takes a little while to learn. Pacing particularly is very different in a comic than it is in a novel.

It wasn't so much the idea of thinking about visuals as thinking about them differently. That was a challenge. And pacing was a challenge because you've really got a very small window of opportunity in which to tell your story, and you've got to pace it just right or it feels funny. Those — pacing and communication of the visuals — were challenges. Characterization was not a challenge because these were characters I'd been working with already.

Steve Gerber: When you translate a property from the still pictures of a comic book to the moving pictures of a motion picture — uh, that's a little redundant — certain changes are necessary. Not everything can be played exactly the same way on the screen as it can on a static comic-book page. Some things that look very interesting on a comic-book page are boring as hell in a movie. And actually, some things that play very well on a screen are very tedious in comic books. The two media have a great deal in common, but they have almost as much separating them.

Archie Goodwin: I did some adaptations of Bram Stoker's stuff, some of Ambrose Bierce's material and some of Poe's. For the first year that I did these things, I felt obligated to give them either new endings or new beginnings — flesh them out in some way so readers who were totally familiar with the stories were still getting a little something more than this completely familiar material. Later on, I began to realize that maybe Edgar Allan Poe and the others knew what they were doing and perhaps they could get along well enough without my help.

Even when I'd add stuff, I'd generally try not to muck up the original story. I just added at the beginning or at the end — until I came to my senses.

Jackson Guice: I've never really worried too much about doing something that's never been done in comic books before, only because after 60-odd years of it I've got to wonder if maybe there's a reason it's never been done in comic books before. Certain things don't really translate well. I think you have to be true to the medium. You're dealing with a comic book. If you want to get very, very heavy into this very intense characterization . . . if you're wanting to do WAR AND PEACE you can do it better as a novel, the way it was done. I don't think WAR AND PEACE would make a very good comic book.

Ed Hannigan: If you took a movie with very little talking, say TOTAL RECALL, and did it verbatim in comic-book form, you'd have page after page of people standing around with word balloons coming out of their mouths. The amount of dialogue you can put in a comic is so tiny. When I type a script I look at it and say, "Man, look at all the lettering the poor letterer has to do." But then I look at all the stuff I threw away.

Fred Hembeck: I find that most of my writing is influenced by what I consider good situation comedy writing. And I try to bring that to my comics. And I try to bring timing to my work because timing is very important in comedy. You can see that in Jack Benny especially. And that's why I think that most of the comic books that have been supposed to be funny in the last couple of years haven't been funny. The jokes might have been there, and the funny drawings might have been there, but the timing was missing. They would just try to pack jokes and puns into a panel without focusing on the reaction, which is necessary for the jokes to go over big.

Bane Kerac: I care only for comics. Of course, I won't refuse some interesting offers in other media if they happened — but strictly on a

short-term basis! Can you imagine a dentist with a stint in cardio-vascular surgery?!?

Jack Kirby: What we do in comic books are just silent movies, and basically I think we're all movie persons. We're trying to make our characters perform, we're trying to make the story interesting, and we have to make a new movie all the time.

Bane Kerac: The movies leave the trace of their influence not only on my work, but on the majority of cartoonists, simply because it's difficult to state clearly if the movies are comic-booky or the comics are movie-like. From Eisenstein's story-boarded scripts to the comic-based films of today, media are so mixed in interaction that sometimes I don't know whether I am director or cartoonist.

Kazuo Koike: In Japan, the public treats comics just like TV. You should think of comics as a part of daily commodity, not anything special from other media. As TV is in every home, comics should be there, too.

Jim Lawrence: I learned early on that you can't just take Ian Fleming's books and translate them into strip form. You've got to have action going, you've got to have T&A, you can't have long sequences of talking heads. Things have to be happening all the time, and you have to have colorful villains.

David Mazzucchelli: There are big differences between film and comics. The most obvious as far as I'm concerned is motion. In film, because the camera moves, you can do a lot of things with motion that you can't do in comics. In comics you have to apply the motion in different ways. Comics, to me, to try to duplicate a film panel-by-panel, can get a little tedious because it slows down the action. In comics you have to compress time and exaggerate things.

Floyd Norman: Although a lot of guys from comic books have come into animation and *vice versa*, it's a different way of working, a different way of thinking. With film the key thing is, you're thinking in terms of time and movement. With comics you have it on paper and you can stare at it for an hour or for just two seconds. With film you're locked into time thinking about how long this will take on the screen.

Alan Moore: I'm interested in manipulating symbols and images in a way that will have a rather subliminal effect on the viewer. I think comics as a medium is ideally suited for this sort of thing, far more so than film, because with comics you can stare at the page for as long as you need in order to absorb all the little hints and suggestions going on in the background.

Randy Stradley: In film, you control the pacing completely. The audience is essentially captive in a darkened theater and the story unfolds for them at a predetermined rate. In comics, the pacing is determined by the reader, pretty much. How long they want to stare at one panel is entirely up to them.

Will Meugniot: Creatively, I think comics are, in a way, more satisfying than animation, because you have fewer levels of editorial input. I find it interesting that when I'm doing one exclusively over the other I always miss the one I'm *not* doing.

Frank Miller: What I love about comics is where the pictures and the words combine. I think about that when I write. Comic-book writing is very different than writing for novels, just as comic-book art is different as could be from illustration. Everything on a comic-book page is communication. The pictures, right down to the way you ink or letter them, are all geared to connect you to the readers.

Alan Moore: You have to accept that kids have been exposed to special effects in movies much more graphic than anything they'll ever see in comics, despite the supposed special-effects advantage that comics have got. The emphasis has to be on what *comics* can offer, compared to the films. Comics are a much more personal experience. It's the dissimilarities between comics and film that interest me more than the similarities.

Dave Ross: I think good comic-book artists can make good storyboard artists. If you have an eye for setting up shots, if you understand when to use particular types of angles, what they denote automatically to people and what they don't, then you'll be very valuable in that line.

Brian Stelfreeze: When you do comics you're an artist, and people treat you like an *artist*. When you do commercial work, you're sort of the last man on the totem pole; you're pretty much at the place where all the [redacted] goes.

Todd Klein: I've done a few logos for advertisers, but not many. While it pays more, the hassles are greater, too. You run into situations where you're redoing a logo two and three times, much more often in advertising than in comics.

Randy Stradley: In a lot of ways, I like

doing comics more than films because it's not such an unwieldy process. It's usually just three or four people collaborating to produce a particular story.

Jan Strnad: I'd like to do more straight text- and prose-writing, as opposed to comic books, but the problem is writing a novel could take a year — then you spend another year trying to sell it, and you're starving. Comic books — I do a story and I get paid immediately, and I can write two stories a month and make a pretty good living at it.

Chuck Pfarrer: Essentially, what I wrote for Dark Horse is a movie in terms of its scope. I basically gave them a film from point A to point B. They get there, there's a dilemma, there's a problem, there's a chase, there appears to be a resolution; it blows all up in terms of its pacing.

Mark Verheiden: Comics are an action medium like movies, and you can do action in them — but it's a different sort of action. When I was doing PREDATOR, I realized that if you tried to break down the last 15 minutes of the movie into comic-book format, to show the big fight between Arnold Schwarzenegger's character and the Predator, you'd have a 40- or 50-page book. Each panel would have to be a set-up, the action, the resulting action. All that stuff can happen in film in one three-second shot.

Here we're talking about a straight adaptation, but you'd really only be story-boarding the movie. You don't need to do that. The video exists on its own and you can rent it for two bucks or less or buy it for $19.95! Why do that?

I made decisions in tandem with Dark Horse, with Mike Richardson and Randy Stradley, to really go for the strengths we felt comics could achieve with these movies.

*Finally, **Scott McCloud** reminds us what all the above have in common:*

No matter what the medium is, people want to read about people.

Comics Around the World

José Luís Garcia-Lopez: I like to show not only fights, but expressions and emotions. I like to do sequences where you don't have a lot of action — but can show a lot of feeling, in the expressions of the characters. Compare the cinema of Argentina and Europe with the films of North America. The American film is mostly action, beautifully done. In the French or Italian films, the camera takes its time to look at the characters from different angles. It's a different style — more lyrical. That's what I'd like to contribute to American comics.

Paul Guinan: One technique that the Japanese use a lot is when a person is contemplating something or reacting to something that someone has said they will use a balloon with an ellipsis, three dots, to indicate sort of an audible thought. We have tended not to use that because it's a convention that's unheard of here. The assumption was made that people wouldn't necessarily understand that technique. Only recently have I begun to see, in just a couple of instances here and there, from artists who are obviously fans of Japanese work, some use of those balloons.

Bane Kerac: I don't divide comics into the European and the American approach — because I create some kind of fusion of all these stereotypes, with new results. I'll stick to my intuition and my personal feelings towards the comics. If that would resemble a Madagascarian approach to the medium to somebody, well, let it be!

Kazuo Koike: Japanese comics move in a frame. The eye moves in Japanese comics. That's the fundamental difference between Japanese and American comics. American comics have a tendency to stay within a frame, and the frame stands individually. Japanese comics have a tendency for one frame to interfere with the next frame, running sequentially. When Superman flies in the sky, if it's drawn in one single frame, that's a still picture. In Japanese comics, a character will fly in three frames while focused on head, body and foot.

Nick Landau: One of the problems we've had in packaging British comics for American reprints is that the original artwork was drawn for black and white, and there is a lot of black. We could not possibly use that amount of black on a color page because black is not a color that prints well. large areas of black tend to turn gray on the Sparta presses. Second, it's very difficult to contrast black with anything other than a light color, so it's difficult to get any mood or effect into the coloring.

David Mazzucchelli: Living in Europe really influenced my work and I think it showed. If you look at the books before I left for Europe and then the ones I did there, you can see the differences. I was starting to think about the graphic design and the impact of the storytelling.

There's this myth that European comics are

so much better than American comics. Everything in Europe is produced in a high-quality package and the artists have a higher level of skill, generally. Once you see past that — to me, anyway — the really interesting work is still a very small percentage of what's going on. When I was there I was fortunate to see some of the truly interesting work and at the same time I had been discovering a lot of the underground and alternative comics. It all sort of came together for me then and I saw how I could bring my interest in comics together with my interest in fine arts and literature.

Scott McCloud: The American attitude places all of the emphasis on the faces and figures, and deemphasizes the environment, which sounds reasonable at first, since most people tend to look at faces and figures more often. People look at people, right? But the reason I think it's a mistake for an *artist* to go in and render the figures and faces so much is because your readers have tons of previous experience which allows them to complete those characters. You don't need to give them much for them to know how a person works, how he's put together. A nose can be just a single line, and they'll know it's a nose, but the environments, the architecture and surroundings and special effects, are things that the artist *does* need to give you, because you're not going to fill those in by yourself. You've never been in these places. Japanese comics sometimes take an almost photographic attitude towards the backgrounds, and leave the characters as just incredibly simple drawings so that the reader can step inside those and fill in the character, fill in his shoes, and walk around in that rendered environment. They're creating a kind of template for reader participation. It all sounds so esoteric, but it's really not. It's just good comics.

JOHN ROMITA JR.

Moebius: I don't use the language that you find in typical American comics. There are certain ways of drawing expressions, the sky, the trees, the buildings, the clothes . . . There are a million such things. Artists don't draw reality, they encode it, and it evolves into a logical, coherent system that readers learn to recognize immediately without being even aware of it.

The Long View: Put Yourself in Perspective

John Romita Jr.: If you had an ego beforeyou were an artist, it gets worse after you win admiration. It's a dangerous thing. A lot of artists get very proud of themselves, and I think they should keep things in perspective. Comics is an important medium, but it's not earth-shattering. I don't think anyone should get too high and mighty.

Sam Kieth: There are people out there who can draw circles around me. There are people who can out-render me. There are people who work better than I can and can get it in faster. There are people who can write and draw. Whatever I do, someone can do it better.

Alan Moore: I'm not so much interested in coming to a conclusion as in examining a problem thoroughly. I've got a strong dislike of what I've referred to as "The Baby Bird School of Comic-Book Moralizing" — where the writer gets the audience to sit there with their beaks open and feeds them. "Here's what you should think about nuclear war. . ." We might be good comics writers, but we don't necessarily know about morality, human nature, and politics.

Denny O'Neil: For some reason, quick success in the comic-book field has a very negative effect on people it happens to. Most of them come out of it, fortunately. One guy that I know well even observed it in others and was all armored for it, and it still happened to him.

Paul Power: Every year the Museum of Broadcasting picks a couple of current shows to honor. They picked LOIS & CLARK. It's a crowd of about 600, and they have to pay $15 a head to get in. Clearly, these are fans that really want to come in. I felt really good about it. As we were walking about and people were saying, "They like us, they really like us," I said, "That's true, except Richard Nixon could have probably got a pretty good crowd even during Watergate, to tell him how great he was."

Words of Inspiration

Sometimes the best tip we can get is just a little reassurance that what we're doing is worthwhile and if we keep plugging we'll reach our goal. Of course, such tips are scattered throughout the book — but if you happen to be looking for one, here's a bunch . . .

Enki Bilal: The art of comic strips appears now as a little bit archaic, but I hope that younger generations are returning to the comics and that the future shall bring us many nice works. Yet comics shouldn't search for the references in themselves! They have to strive for broadness, to meet the demands of an audience and to endure the competition of other artforms.

Nathaniel Branden: People often ask me what do I think of daydreams. A daydream that inspires you to action, eventually, is a good daydream. One that becomes your substitute for action is dangerous. And the same thing is what I would say about the best of comic strips. If they inspire you — if you use it as energy to live more heroically in real-life, adult terms — then they have performed one of the most important services of romantic art. But if they become merely a kind of alternative reality, where in your dreams you're daring and brave and courageous, but in actual life you are a mediocrity who never aspires to anything challenging — then the problem is that they helped you stay passive, rather than inspire you to become active.

Mike Friedrich: TEENAGE MUTANT NINJA TURTLES showed that if you create something that you believe in you can grab the gold ring. They are an inspiration to people to follow their dreams.

Richard Pini: The fact that Wendy has done all of the creative things that she has, while I have done the business and managerial things that I have — and we are both individuals doing them and not a conglomerate — provides something of a role model for people to try the same thing.

Joe Colquhoun: The very first publication I saw of my work gave me the most euphoric feeling I've ever had. It's like having your first woman, I suppose . . . never to be repeated.

Jack Davis: I would tell any young person coming along that it takes a lot of work and you have to enjoy what you're doing. If you don't enjoy it and believe in yourself, you'd better get out. I enjoy it when it's not like work. It's work when you get overloaded and deadlines sneak up on you. But it is very rewarding.

Ernie Colón: There are times when I sit down and say, "I'm going to do *twenty-three* pages of this? How [redacted]am I going to get through this?" And when you get through it you say, "Ahh, that wasn't so bad. What's the next project."

Neil Gaiman: I phoned up Karen Berger in the middle of "Brief Lives", and I just said to her . . . "This isn't working, it's a huge mistake, I'm completely out of my depth. I'm completely lost, we should never have started this, I don't know who told me I could write in the first place and this has never happened before." And there was a pause and she said, "Yes, it has." And I said, "What?" And she said, "Well, the last time you did this was halfway through 'A Game of You'." And I said, "Really?" And she said, "Yeah. And the time before that, you phoned me up halfway through 'Season of Mists' and said exactly the same thing." And I said "Oh. Did I really?" And she said, "Yeah." And I said, "Oh . . . okay. I'll shut up then."

Andy Mushynsky: As long as you keep making marks on paper, the job will get done.

Mike Kazaleh: I think it's a good quality for anybody's artwork, if it has some of their own flavor to it.

Bane Kerac: It is difficult to become internationally recognized — but not in the sense that it's something unbearable. All you need is work and a lot of patience and if work is the pleasure — as is the case with cartooning — then the time factor, spending the time at work counts as "difficulty." The ingredients for success are 10% talent,

Neil Gaiman: If you try to do something, then, yeah, maybe you'll fall flat on your face, and if you don't try at all, then, you won't do anything. And if you fall, sometimes you wake up, and sometimes you die, and sometimes you fly.

Sam Kieth: I don't think I've done the work I'd be most proud of or known for yet.

Goseki Kojima: I draw alone at the edge, fearing someone, some day, will surpass me. So, naturally my drawing has a tendency for the growth momentum. If I ever wear down, the pictures will become dull and low tone.

Denny O'Neil: One of the greatest charms of comics when I started was that there were zero expectations. Everybody expected it to be dreck. So, if you were one micron better than dreck, you were great. Now, there are standards. We are being recognized as a valid art form.

Mike Royer: The last time I looked in a comic the stuff was so damn good it intimidated me. If I've learned anything in this business it's that it is never too late to learn, and it's never too late to be enthusiastic.

Wendy Pini: If you love your characters, if you're bonded to them, if your characters are a little bit of a part of you, then that is going to come through. People are so smart and so sensitive that they pick up on that and they feel it.

Steve Rude: I feel like I'm doing a service to myself when I take on different challenges. It's healthy for me mentally . . .

Jim Salicrup: I'm a big disbeliever in conventional wisdom.

Ken Selig: Any creative person, if he's a *good* creative person he's going to be putting himself out on a limb and he's gonna be saying one thing and one thing only about his creative counterparts: *I'm better than you are!* He's *got* to say it because that's the only way you *can* be a creative person! You've got to think that you've got a special perception of life that belongs to you and only you and only you know how to utilize it. It sounds egotistical but it's really a matter of survival. That's how a creative mind survives. If we all thought at the outset that we're all equals then *nothing* would ever get done in the creative world at all.

Bill Sienkiewicz: The first issue of ELEKTRA, as much as I thrashed around, was like learning to jet-ski and falling down a lot. After a while I didn't mind falling, because it was only water that I was hitting at umpteen many miles an hour, and I started to not mind falling down so much 'cause I realized that in the act of falling I was learning balance. Keeping that attitude is really the thing that's helped me the most with the project. It's also helped my jet-skiing.

Marc Silvestri: I have my pride. Regardless of the schedule, regardless of everything else, I have my pride. I want to do a good job.

Brian Stelfreeze: Before I got into comics I did everything an artist could possibly do. I played around with fine art, architectural illustrations, commercial illustrations, everything you can think of, and I always got *bored* with it. I think comics rounds me out. And I can't get bored with it, because there's always something new.

Jan Strnad: I look at the very best work being done, and wonder why I'm not doing work that is that good.

Dan Thorsland: Like Luke Skywalker, you have to strike out on your own. You can stay at the safe, almost parental company. There was very little that was negative about my career at DC. I was there for six years. I had a lot of really good friends whom I desperately miss. I was very happy there. But sometimes you have to strike out on your own. Dark Horse is an established company, but it's also 3,000 miles away from my place of birth and my family.

Cat Yronwode: It comes down to this: Are we, are my peers and age cohorts, turning into those 40-year-old comic-book editors trying to popularize whatever I liked, but two years later? "The Human Torch and the Thing meet the Beatles." It was so horrible! That's when I realized Stan Lee wasn't the genius of the western world. That he was some 40-year-old guy trying to keep on top of "today's youth culture." And it was when I realized that Stan Lee was just another bozo, writing fiction, putting books together, packaging comics, that I realized I could have *my* moment in popular culture. I could do whatever I wanted in popular culture. I didn't do it then, of course, but I saw that it was possible.

Arn Saba: Most of the people I know who want to be artists, but can't get around to it, are bedeviled by security fears. People who say, "I'd like to be a cartoonist, I'd like to be a writer, but first of all I want to have a house so I have someplace to live while I write a novel." Come on! You're never going to do it! You have to do it in the face of adversity. Sleep on the drawing board, and have a lovely meal of macaroni and cheese,

or whatever you have to do, in some friend's basement. Do what you have to do. You can't let reality stand in your way.

Tad Pietrzykowski: If you're creative and you *want* to do something, there's nothing worse in life than saying, "Gee, I *wish* I'd done that." I'd rather say, "Gee, I'm *glad* I did that."

The Rest of the World: Tips Not Necessarily about Comics

Bob Burden: If you're going to buy something to pick up girls with, don't buy a car with a landau roof, or a sports car or a gold chain. Buy shoes first. And take a girl along to help pick them out.

Sharon Cho: I grew up reading SUPERMAN and BATMAN and SPIDER-MAN and believing all those old adages, that with great power comes great responsibility, that one man or woman can make a difference, that one shouldn't stoop to other people's levels. I'm disappointed that in the real world it doesn't always happen that way, but I grew up with a sense that I can make a difference.

David Anthony Kraft: Always give quality — whether in terms of time, if you're being paid to do a job or just volunteering help; if you're writing or drawing, publishing or distributing or retailing; if you're with friends or family. If anything's worth doing, it's worth doing well.

Vince Lee: If you don't know where you're going then you're not going to know when you get there.

Wendy Pini: Every time you get kicked in the teeth you have two options: you fold, or you get stronger. And I find that getting stronger is what it is all about for me.

Charles M. Schulz: I cannot believe the inefficiency of someone who will write to you — especially when he or she wants a big favor — and does not even take the time to spell your name right. Last year I did one of these classroom interviews; a boy wrote to me and he wanted to know if I would take part in this, and I wrote back. And when we finally reached appointment day I said, "Before we begin, when you wrote me the letter did your teacher help you with it?" He said yes, and I said, "Well, I think the teacher and you and all of the people in your class should know right now — when you write to somebody in the days to come, whether it's a business letter

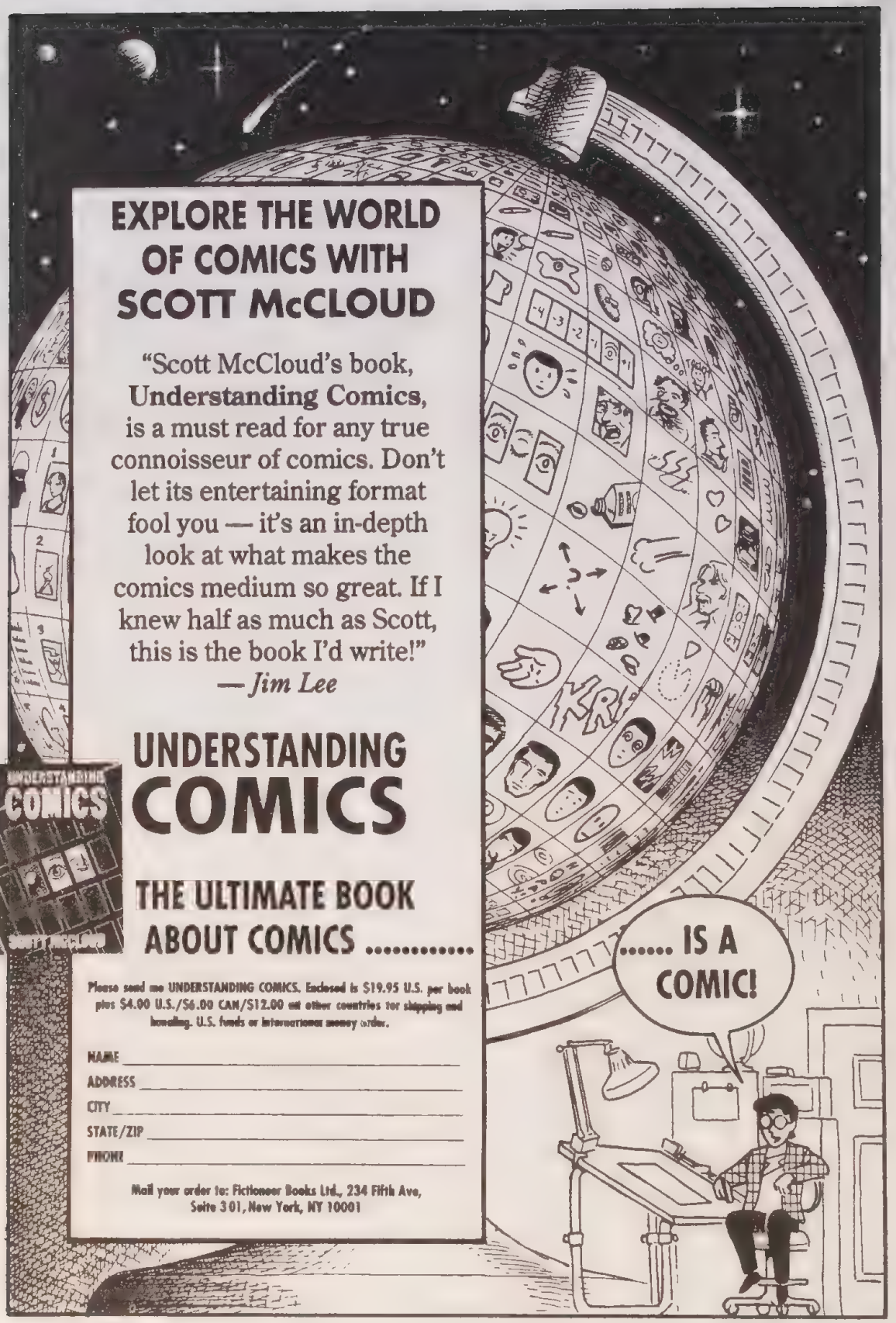
BOB BURDEN

or a social letter, the first thing that you should do is make sure that you spell the name of the person to whom you are writing correctly. You did not spell my name right."

Dan Thorsland: The lesson you learn from STAR WARS isn't that you're going to beat the Empire, but that it's a great cause and noble struggle. I think the same is true of life. If people are trying to oppress you or if they're trying to screw with your livelihood and your family, it isn't whether or not you die, it's whether or not you've lived your life the way you wanted to live it up to that point. I think there are a lot of people who somehow feel trapped or doomed. I remind them time and time again that life does indeed have limitless possibilities. If you really want something bad enough, you can do it — or at least have a great time striving for it.

The above would make a pretty good punch line for a book like this. But instead, I'd like to close it off with this tip on health maintenance, from ***Ed O'Neal:***

I remember my great-great uncle always in the spring went behind the barn to the gigantic pile of cow shit, cut off his longjohns, which he had sewed himself into (except for front and back flap) the previous late October, dug a hole in the manure and had my granddad bury and pack tight the manure around him up to his chin. Gripped in this malodorous mixture he stayed 24 hours. It was my job every two hours to go out and wipe his brow and give him a 12-ounce glass of water. After 24 hours we dug him up. He was one pink, rosy son of a bitch, feisty as hell and ten times as sprightly as the day before. Plus he had lost about 15 pounds.



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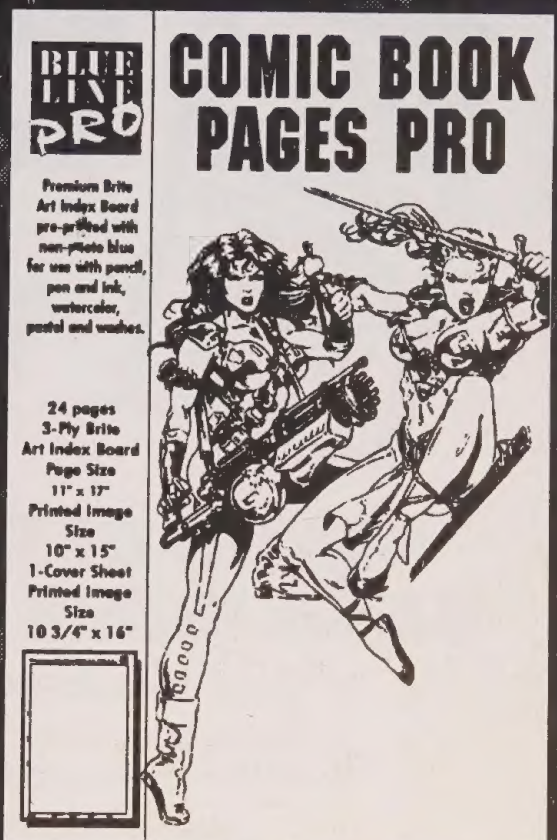

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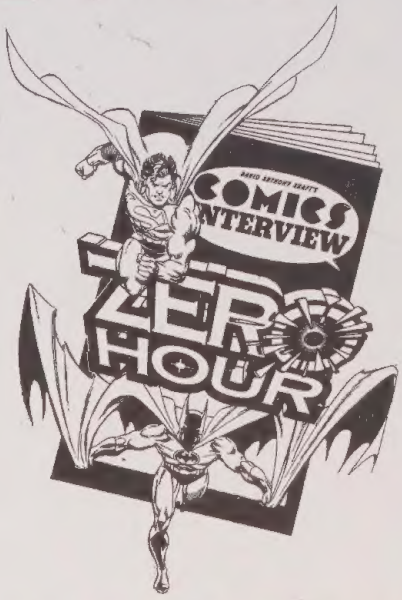

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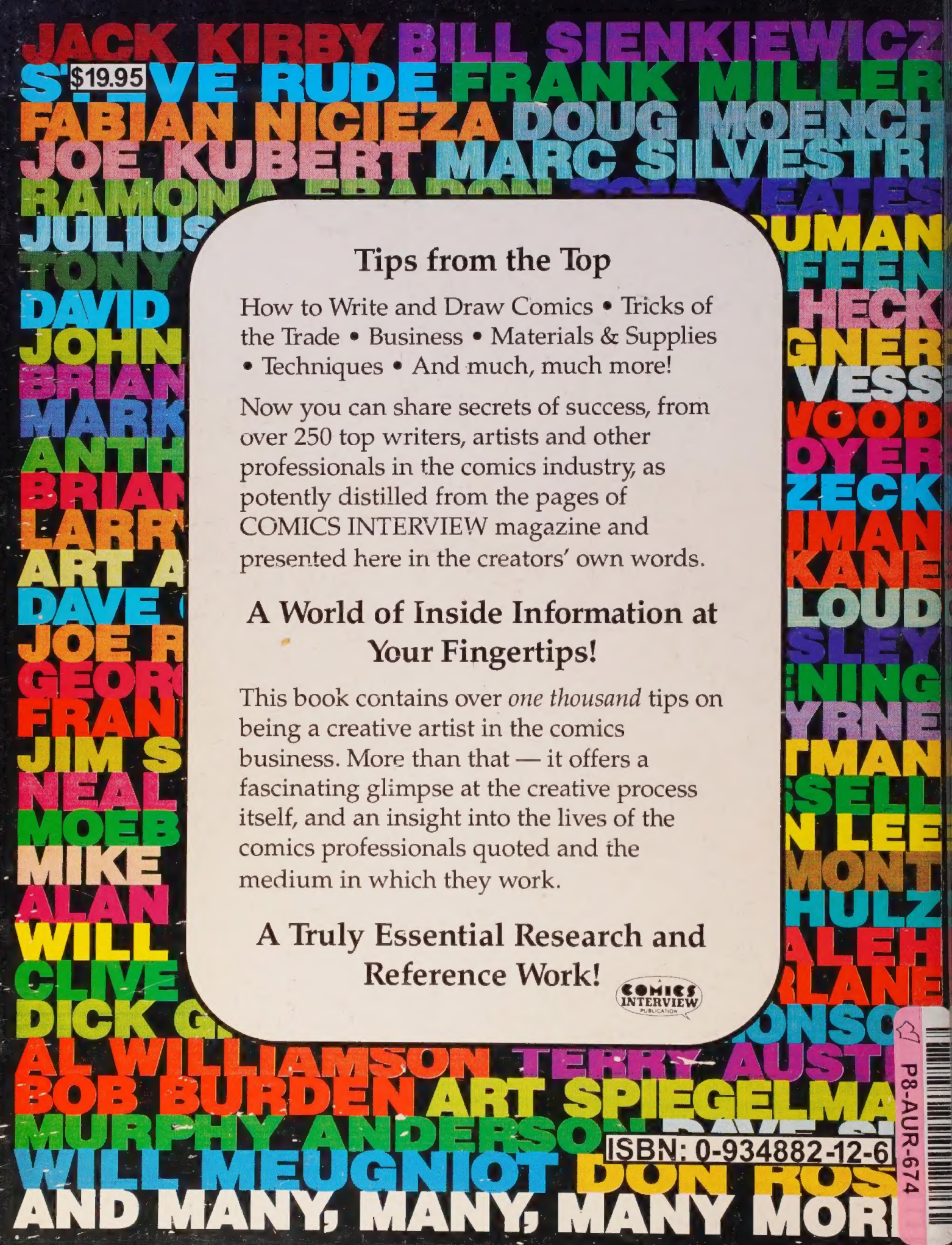
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